



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 1 January 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 11th January 2015: Manjeera Barrage, Sangareddy, Medak District. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Made up of several small islands, the Manjeera Bird Sanctuary is spread over 20 sq km and is nestled between the Manjeera and Singur barrages. A number of migratory and resident birds nest and breed here. Painted Storks, Herons, Wigeons, Teals, Cormorants, Pochards, Black and White Ibises, etc can be found here. A few Mugger crocodiles too call this sanctuary home. It is located 60km from Hyderabad.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Mr Ch. Venugopal, Director, Geological Institute of India, on "Insight into the world of Dinosaurs".

Tuesday, 6th January 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Dinosaurs are giant reptiles that lived many millions of years back, and inspire a sense of awe whenever we talk about them. Their origins, life and extinction are enveloped in mystery. Mr Venugopal will share these and other interesting facts about the dinosaurs in his talk.

Trip Report – Manjeera Barrage, 11th January 2015

Text: Ranjan Matthew; Photos: Hemant Kumar



Rosy Starling

The first official BSAP field outing of 2015 was at Manjeera Barrage, "a very popular spot with our birders" as Shafaat sir stated on the email to the group earlier this month. My expectations, along with those of several other birders I am sure, were already raised pretty high and I was up at the crack of dawn to meet the group at Panjagutta crossroads.

The drive to Manjeera Barrage is a long one, especially for Hyderabadis, who are mostly used to commuting in and around the city within a 6 to 7 km radius. The highway past Patancheru offered no easy drive even that early in the morning, all riddled

with potholes and people driving on the wrong side. The promise of fruitful birdwatching, however, guided us all quickly and safely to our destination. On the dusty approach paths through the little village before the Manjeera Barrage, the convoy spotted several Rosy Starlings (*Sturnus roseus*) along the wires. Also spotted in the trees by the fields were several Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*) and their nests, a pretty sight and testimony to their impressive weaving skills! Hovering and resting Black-winged Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) were also seen along the way.

As the cars pulled up in the parking area of the Barrage, a bright yellow Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*) was spotted hopping among the higher branches of the trees. Members all met and greeted each other in the early morning sunlight as we were pleasantly greeted by the Forest Dept. staff with a steaming hot breakfast and cups of tea. A welcome move and extremely kind of the Forest Dept. to organize a pre-birding energy boost in the wee hours!

After everyone had their fill of *puris* and *dal*, we went up to the barrage to see what we could see. The lake seemed to have a sparse population of birds nearer to the bund and dam where we were standing, but in the distance we could spot larger flocks of birds in and around the water. The BSAP Vanguard scope was quickly brought in to action and propped up for a better view. As the action picked up, several Pheasant-tailed (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) and Bronze-winged (*Metopidius indicus*) Jacanas were seen wading around the shallows at the far bank and one fellow gave us all quite a run for our money when we spent a long time debating what it could be! Our doubts were put to a cool rest by Hemant who affirmed it was a Juvenile Bronze-winged Jacana. Interesting to know that Krys's Field Guide doesn't illustrate this particular plumage with such a pronounced shade of orange on the breast of the bird. Also spotted in the initial hours were Purple (*Ardea purpurea*) and Grey (*Ardea cinerea*) Herons in the tall grass on the far banks. Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*) hunted the waters as Indian Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) floated in the distance. All seemed well in the world of our feathered friends.



Black-headed Cuckooshrike

As the day moved on, much to the delight of the birdwatchers, the District Forest Officer, Mr. Shivaiah, and his staff, got the boat organized for members to go around the main island in the lake to get a clearer idea of the wildlife and ecosystem. This proved to be a real treat for everyone. Almost 80 Glossy Ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*), 300+ Common Coots (*Fulica atra*), and about 95 Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) adorned the lake further away from the bund. Good numbers of Cotton Pygmy-goose (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) were spotted with flashing emerald-green wings as they flew. Our boatman

skillfully pointed out a solitary Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) as it soared high overhead. Spot-billed Ducks were seen all around the lake in small groups, Little Cormorants were seen in hordes, and large fresh-water fish would jump out of the lake randomly. The lake was abuzz with action. In fact, the species that caused the most excitement, among young and old members alike, were the large and intimidating fresh-water crocodiles! Almost 7 or 8 were spotted snoozing with their mouths wide open in the bright daylight sun, recharging their batteries (as these beasts are cold-blooded). The largest of the lot, some 6 to 7 feet in length, caused several gasps on our boat, some even hinting she might have been a pregnant female. A very promising ecosystem had spread itself before our eyes and didn't cease to amaze and delight us.

Black-winged Kites tried their luck at hunting around the banks of the water body. Members enjoyed watching a Little Cormorant struggle with a fish much larger than it could swallow, and eventually it had to give it up. Common Pochards (*Aythya ferina*) with their copper-coloured heads were seen as well. Bigger raptors also graced the occasion, with a solitary Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) majestically scanning the banks, and a single Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), and Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur Indus*) were also seen during the course of the day. All through the day, however, plenty of River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) made their presence felt, gracefully swaying over the water looking for prey. Not in such great numbers, were a couple of Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*), which was an interesting spotting. Several Darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*) or 'Snake Birds' were also seen resting on the stray pieces of wood sticking out of the water.

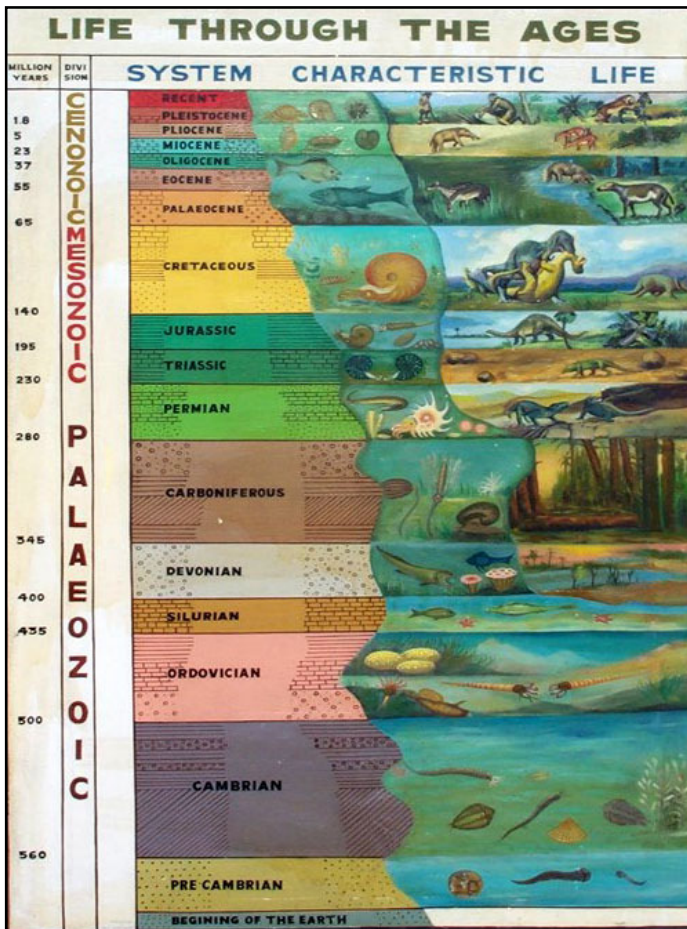


Greater Spotted Eagle

Thanks to the extremely jovial, untiring, and accommodating Forest Dept. staff, all the members were able to go around the lake to observe the fantastic wildlife it had to offer, over almost 3 hours and 4 boat rides! 36 members in all turned up and approximately 28 species of birds were noted. All in all, it proved to be a highly exciting and informative day for all. We at the BSAP would like to extend our thanks to Mr. Shivaiah, DFO, and his staff for making excellent arrangements for us, and also to Mr. Ramakrishna Rao for helping us make this trip such a great success!

Indoor Meeting – Talk on “An Insight into the World of Dinosaurs”, 6th January 2015

Dr G Samuel Sukumar



Dinosaurs are giant reptiles with significant anatomical and physiological differences from the present day reptiles that lived in the Mesozoic period and became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous period. The life and extinction of the dinosaurs is surrounded by mysteries and interesting facts. The remains of dinosaurs are found as fossil record in the Mesozoic sediments all over the world, including India. The Indian dinosaurs are poorly studied compared to the Chinese and American counterparts. The ongoing research is revealing unexpected angles of their life habits etc., The birds are now considered to be the survivors of dinosaurs and possibly dinosaurs can be recreated by genetic engineering. The extinction of the dinosaurs is an equally enigmatic phenomenon, not explained satisfactorily so far. We humans have much to learn from the origin and extinction of the dinosaurs.

The dinosaurs evolved from a primitive archosaur reptile and diversified into various groups that consists of about 500 known species belonging to saurischians and ornithischians, the former are herbivores and carnivores with bipedal and quadrupedal gait, while the latter are herbivores with quadrupedal gait. The saurischians are classified into sauropods and theropods based on the leg anatomy. This dinosaur group became well diversified into 85 ft size brontosaurus to dinosaur as small as 16 inch microsaurus. The smaller raptors with feathers initially acquired for insulation gradually used them for giving lift while running. Slowly the feathers got further modified and the gliding motion started in the dinosaurs. During the course of evolution, which was non linear and asymmetrical, the true birds with powered flight have emerged to survive the great extinction due to the catastrophic event of the meteoric hit at the end of Cretaceous.

Present research reveals that most of the dinosaurs were feathered. Now the scientists believe that dinosaurs can be grouped into avian dinosaurs and the non avian dinosaurs. The archaeopteryx is considered to be the missing link between birds and reptiles but the Chinese finds have now provided closer missing links between dinosaurs and birds.



Archaeopteryx fossil remains indicating feathers



A view of dinosaur bones exposed during excavation showing ilium, femur, humerus, scapula, coracoid etc. at Adilabad



Dinosaur skeleton during reconstruction, Birla Science Centre, Hyderabad



Dinosaur skeleton after reconstruction, Birla Science Centre, Hyderabad

Brief note on bird sightings around Indira Park

Text and photos: Gunbir Singh



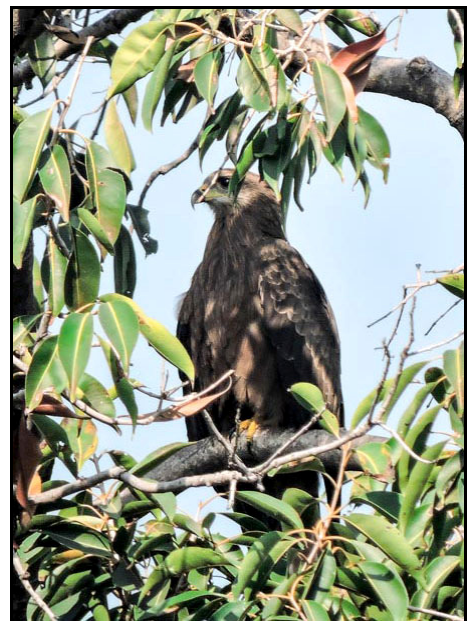
Red-vented Bulbul

Ever since I have joined BSAP & have come as close as possible to our feathered friends, my eyes are always looking around to spot any avian beauty if possible. One morning when I was sitting in my verandah sipping my morning tea, to my delight I spotted a pair of Red-vented Bulbuls. I ran inside for my camera and was lucky to capture an image before they took flight.

faithful partner on my morning walks so that I can stop and capture any feathered fascination behind the lens. One morning at Indira Park I spotted a large bird landing in the lake and clicked the photos of a Spot-billed Duck, and also spotted a raptor sitting on the tree, which turned out to be a Black Kite.



Spot-billed Duck



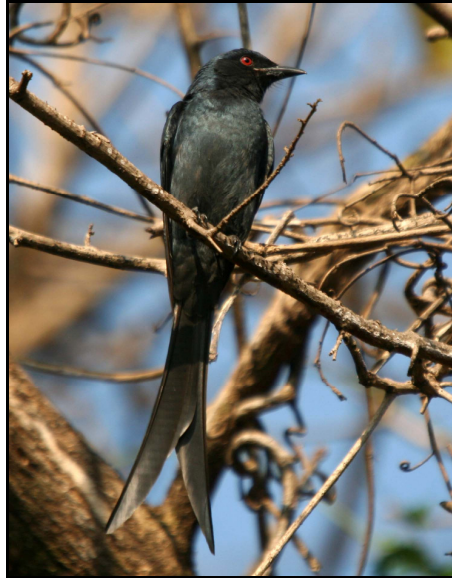
Black Kite

From then on, my customary cup of morning tea is never without camera at hand. My camera has also become my

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*)



Ashy Drongo

(Ankola, Karnataka, 05-02-2012)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Dicruridae
Genus: *Dicrurus*
Species: *D. leucophaeus*
Size: 29 cm

Description & distribution: The Ashy Drongo, a member of the drongo family Dicruridae, is mainly ashy- to dark-grey, with crimson irises, a long, deeply-forked tail and, in some sub-species, a white patch around the eye, or white markings on the head. The underparts may be dull or somewhat glossy dark-grey, while the upperparts are slate-grey. Juvenile birds are brownish in colour. Since the grey colouration is very variable, a more reliable diagnostic feature is the absence of the white rictal spot at the base of the bill (as opposed to the Black Drongo, where the white rictal spot is present).

The Ashy Drongo is widely distributed across South and South-east Asia, from eastern Afghanistan across the Himalayas to southern China and Indonesia. It breeds in the Himalayas and the north-east Indian hills, and winters in the plains of peninsular India and Sri Lanka. The sub-species found across the Himalayas is *D. l. longicaudatus* (which includes *D. l. beavani*, described by Charles Laurie), whereas *D. l. hopwoodi* is found in the eastern Himalayas, which becomes *D. l. mouhouti* in Thailand and Myanmar. The northern part of the range has *D. l. leucogenis* and

D. l. salangensis, both of which migrate south, including to Nagaland, and the south of the range has *D. l. bondi*. The south-east Asian islands have several insular populations (*D. l. periophthalmus*, *D. l. batakensis*, *D. l. phaedruss*, *D. l. siberu*, and *D. l. nigrescens*). Java, Bali, Simalur, Lombok, Palawan and the Balabac Islands are said to have the nominate race.

Behaviour: The Ashy Drongo is usually found singly, in pairs or in small groups, though small flocks may fly together during migration. It has short legs, and is usually seen perched high on a tree, on electric wires or other prominent spots. It sometimes looses for food on tree trunks, but usually gathers its insect diet through aerial sallies. The call is a *drangh-gip* or *gip-gip-drangh*, but it can imitate the calls of other birds, including the melodious whistling of the Common Iora.

Nesting: The Ashy Drongo breeds from May to June. The nest is usually a loose cup in forks of tree trunks or branches. The eggs are reddish or brown in colour. The usual clutch is three to four eggs.

Local name: The Ashy Drongo is known as 'budidarangu aitrinta' in Telugu, 'erattai valan kuruvi' in Tamil (a name also used for the Black Drongo and the White-bellied Drongo), and 'kakka thampooran' in Malayalam.

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)

Editor's note

Some of our members had been to Kerala for a week-long birding camp from 9th to 15th of November, 2014. In this Special Issue of the Pitta, we are happy to bring you the experiences shared by the participants, along with a number of colourful photographs.

Munnar

(Day One & Two)
Surekha Aitabathula



Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

It seemed unnecessary to look for the typical black and yellow railway station boards; we could straight away recognise Kerala as soon as our train entered this unique landscape. Lush greenery is the first indicator. Scores of trees and plants possess clean leaves in myriad shades of green and sway in the constant breeze. Our train thundered past what looked like an uninterrupted landscape painting! This is how the BSAP birding camp to Kerala began, on a train that took twenty of us to Ernakulum Station. We had our first Kerala lunch here, hopped into our minibus and headed out to the mother of all hill stations - Munnar.

The landscape from Ernakulum to Munnar got more and more pristine as our bus ate up the miles in an unhurried drive. Our bus negotiated a serpentine climb as our Resort stood atop a hill. On arrival around late evening, eager to get the camp started, we spilled out of our bus and made a dash for our allotted rooms.

Our group bonded well right from the beginning. The easy camaraderie, our common hobby and a holiday mood heightened our sense of excitement as we held up a clean slate for the Kerala bird list. This mood revved up our appetite, in anticipation of tasting typical Kerala cuisine, especially the fish-eaters amongst us! The established universal favourite was, however, *Appam*. The happy fallout of eating *appam* is that (a) you definitely cannot eat just one and (b) you don't know when to stop. The soft and delicious *appam* comes with a variety of curries. My take on this brilliant culinary delight is no matter how delicious your curry, the *appam* dominates your taste buds.

Situated at an altitude of 6000 ft in Idukki district, Munnar is an unending expanse of tea plantations and wildlife sanctuaries, pristine valleys and mountains and exotic species of flora



Lesser Hill Myna
(Photo: Umesh Mani)



Nilgiri Tahr (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

Thrush, and Indian Blackbird. Such sweet and salted snacks which these birds have become habituated to eating, contain *maida*, sugar, chocolate, milk, salt and junk food fats which are toxic and harmful to their health. Birds are not equipped to break down these foods which are fundamentally alien to their digestive systems. The ignorant human is unaware that he may be seriously harming the birds with this food. When will man learn that he is not the only rightful denizen of this planet, and that the immense wealth of nature is not for him to plunder?



Kerala Laughingthrush
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

Coming back to the birds, the Scaly Thrush is a gorgeously patterned beauty. The sexes are similar, 27–31 cm long, with black scaling on a paler white or yellowish background. The most striking identification feature in flight is the black band on the white underwings, a feature shared with the Siberian Thrush. The male's song is a loud, far-carrying mechanical whistle.



Scaly Thrush (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Another visitor to the canteen, the Kerala Laughingthrush is a species of laughingthrush endemic to the hills of the Western Ghats. Found in the high montane forests, this grey-bibbed, rufous-bellied bird with a prominent dark eye stripe and broad white brow was earlier grouped along with the grey-breasted subspecies of the Black-chinned Laughingthrush and known as the Grey-breasted Laughingthrush, but has now been designated as a separate species. This species has a dark grey-brown crown and narrow dark grey eye-stripe with a broad white supercilium above it, which extends behind the eye in the nominate subspecies but stops above the eye in the subspecies *meridionale*.

The Indian Blackbird also came for the crumbs. This bird looks like a darker version of the songster, Malabar Whistling Thrush. This species breeds in woods and gardens, and builds a neat, mud-lined, cup-shaped nest. It is omnivorous, eating a wide range of insects, earthworms, berries and fruits.



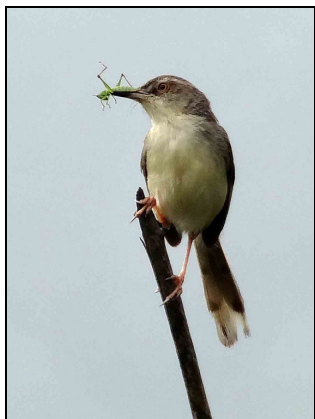
Indian Blackbird (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

Both sexes are territorial on breeding grounds and have a distinctive threat display.

We also saw the Malabar Whistling Thrush here. The genus name, *Myiophonus*, means 'fly murderer' in Latin. Named after the American naturalist, Thomas Horsfield, this bird is often found in hilly countries near streams with flowing water. The bird has a remarkable whistle which has a human quality and is very musical and exuberant. So much so that it is also known as the 'Whistling Schoolboy'!



Malabar Whistling Thrush
(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)



Plain Prinia

(Photo: Aparna Surampudi)



White-bellied Shortwing

(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

Another superb sighting here was the White-bellied Shortwing.

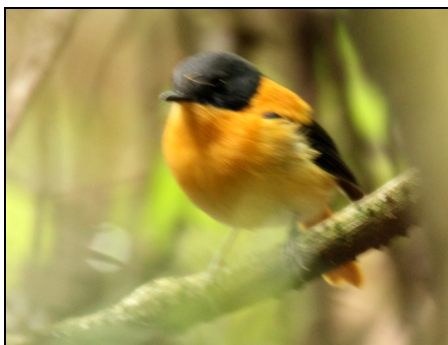
From there we walked up a winding road. The first sighting here was a Plain Prinia with a catch, perched on a stalk.

That was when we experienced what I would call the mother of all bird sightings! A raptor suddenly appeared high up in the sky, gliding magnificently. It was airborne for a very short duration before it landed on the ground, out of sight, but not before our fellow birders captured it on camera for posterity. I remember catching a glimpse of a very, very beautiful and busy black-stripe design on its fawnish underbelly. It came like a flash and vanished just as swiftly leaving us awestruck!

When the photograph was sent for identification to experts, lo and behold! The raptor was the Eurasian Sparrowhawk. Those of us who saw it did a belated celebratory dance on learning the identity later! Our members Umesh Mani and Gowthama Poludasu's pictures have become what could possibly be the first ever photographic record of this raptor in Kerala.



Eurasian Sparrowhawk (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Black-and-Orange Flycatcher

(Photo: Umesh Mani)

We were fortunate enough to see the glittering, gem-like Black-and-orange Flycatcher. This endemic bird of the Western Ghats is near-threatened. The Square-tailed Bulbul, earlier known as the Black Bulbul, was another interesting sighting. This bird is a dark, sooty grey with a very short crest and square-tipped tail and has a glossy black head with a greenish sheen.

We also saw the Nilgiri Pipit, which is heavily-streaked on crown and upperparts, and has a comparatively shorter tail than the Paddyfield Pipit.

These small passerine birds are slender, somewhat drab, ground-feeding insectivores of the open country. They are monogamous and territorial. Pipits are ground nesters, laying up to six speckled eggs.

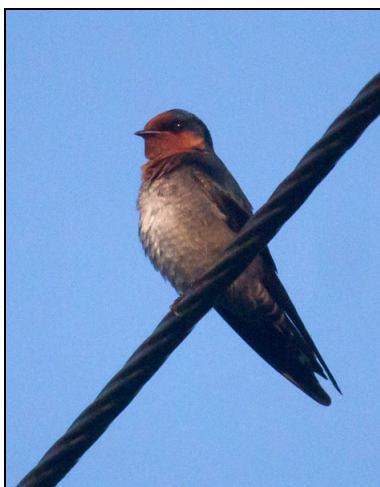


Nilgiri Pipit (Photo: Umesh Mani)

On the wires, we saw a few swallows which were initially dismissed as Red-rumped Swallows before our guide informed us that they were actually the Hill Swallows, a recent split from the erstwhile Pacific Swallow.

Our next stop was a small patch of forest near a school in Kannimalai. Square-tailed Bulbuls, Tytler's Leaf Warbler, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Crested Serpent Eagle and Nilgiri Flycatchers were the interesting sightings here.

The last stop of the day was a location called Pothamedu which turned out to be more than satisfactory birding. We saw the Yellow-browed Bulbul – its yellow supercilium, the prominent eye-ring, the yellow underparts with olive-green upperparts, a contrasting jet black



Hill Swallow

(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

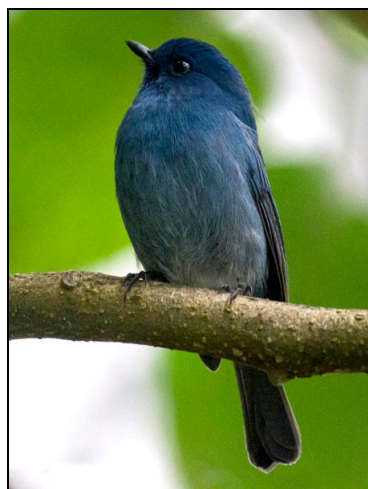


Square-tailed Bulbul

(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

and breast, an unstreaked green belly and flanks, and beautiful crimson cheeks, throat and breast.

The pronounced crest, the large bill and the never-ending tail of the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo are also very striking and dramatic.



Nilgiri Flycatcher male

(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)



Nilgiri Flycatcher female

(Photo: Umesh Mani)

ended Day 2 of our camp. For us birders, our cups had brimmed over with the sightings of some really stunning birds. Birding in Kerala is a thoroughly attractive proposition. Wherever you are, you are surrounded by greenery, which is a birdwatcher's main requirement. The environs are scenic with agricultural fields and green streets are dotted with prosperous-looking, independent houses with cottage roofs and pretty gardens. This is India's lucky state where rains never fail.

Thus



Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher

(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

The day had thrown up some fabulous finds for us, such as the Kerala Laughingthrush, Indian/Eurasian Blackbird, White-bellied Shortwing, Scaly Thrush, Black Eagle, Hill Swallow, Nilgiri Flycatcher and Nilgiri Pipit.



Nilgiri Wood Pigeon

(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)



Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike

(Photo: Umesh Mani)



Red-whiskered Bulbul

(Photo: Umesh Mani)



Tytler's Leaf Warbler (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Black Eagle (Photo: Umesh Mani)

The Magic of Thattekad

(Day Three & Four)

Umesh Mani



Vernal Hanging Parrot (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Days 3 & 4 of the Kerala camp were the days we were supposed to spend at Thattekad Bird Sanctuary. Given that it is a birding hotspot *non pareil*, and boasts of a checklist of some 300 bird species, in my mind I had already (!) tagged these days as the high point of the trip. Thattekad had been on my wishlist since a long time, and the various trip reports and photographs posted by other visitors to Thattekad earlier had only served to push my anticipation sky-high. So when this opportunity to visit Thattekad finally materialised, I was, of course, happy, but was also worried in no small measure – worried that it may turn out to be a let-down.

Suffice to say that *that* did not happen - Thattekad more than lived up to its promise.

We had already scored the first *coup* of sorts, when we managed to get as our guide the legendary Eldhose who, it is said, knows Thattekad like the back of his hand – knows it so well, in fact, that he knows the DOB and address of every bird in Thattekad! Well, apocryphal as that last bit may be, it does show the solid reputation and track record that he has built up over the years. So when Shafaatsaab secured his services well in advance, I knew we were in good hands.

The day started with a four-hour drive from Munnar to Thattekad. So, by the time we arrived at the sanctuary around 11AM, I for one was itching to get started.

After a few to-and-fro calls between Shafaatsaab and Eldhose, we picked him up *en route* and drove directly towards the sanctuary. The first few people to get down from the bus were treated to the first sighting of the Malabar Grey Hornbill, but by the time the rest of us could disembark, the bird had already moved into the trees, with Gowthama and a couple of others in hot pursuit. There was also a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo dancing attendance on the Hornbill; both seemed to be moving in tandem.

These initial sightings, it seemed, had started the adrenaline flowing, and most members of the group were quite excited. Since we were to have a quick breakfast before entering the sanctuary, Shafaatsaab had his hands full, getting everyone to settle down and get on with it.

Anyway, after a quick bite, we rushed back to the bus. Eldhose told us that he was taking us to the core area of the sanctuary, where visitors generally are not allowed to enter. When we reached there, we were met by Ajomon, one of his assistants, and they engaged in a rapid-fire discussion in Malayalam before taking off at a fast pace, with all of us following.

The first thing we saw was the beautiful, maroon Malabar Giant Squirrel, with its trademark bushy tail, which is almost longer than the rest of its body. It was foraging high up in the palm trees, and we got a crick in our necks, trying to see



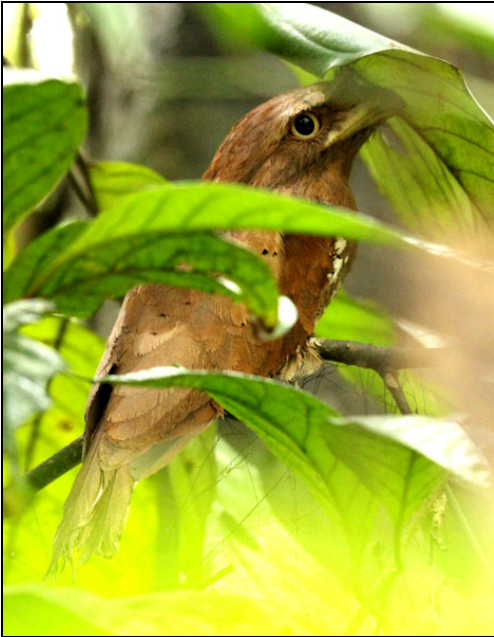
Malabar Giant Squirrel (Photo: Umesh Mani)

and photograph it. Next to follow was the Malabar Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis sylvicola*), which used to be regarded as a sub-species of the Common Woodshrike, but has recently been split and given full species status. Besides, some members had also seen a pair of Crested Serpent Eagles in flight.

Suddenly, Eldhose received a message from his assistant, and started walking briskly off, herding us along. Just a few minutes' walk away, they stopped at a head-high bush and pointed out a dry brown leaf to us. At least, it *looked* like a dry brown leaf. It took quite a few minutes before we realised that we were looking at the flagship species of Thattekad – the Sri Lankan Frogmouth!



Malabar Woodshrike (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Sri Lankan Frogmouth female
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

For the past two days, we had been listening to Gowthama's incessant recital of one mantra - "I want to see the Frogmouth".

Finally, I thought, we would not have to listen to that any more. Little did I realise that the only change that would happen was that he (and, to be fair, most of us) were now going to be reciting, "I saw the Frogmouth"!!

A few words about the Frogmouth. A master of camouflage, besides its cryptic plumage, its main defence mechanism seems to be its ability to stay still for hours at a time. As we too saw, it stayed so still that someone actually said, "Is it really a bird? I think it is a wooden model!" So much so that after the photographers had had their fill, some other members of the group were able to get close enough to actually photograph it using their cellphones! Possibly the only miss at that point was that we could see only the female of the species.

But still, what a way to start - the number one target species ticked off within barely half an hour of walking in!

Thus far, the excitement had kept us going, but we suddenly realised that it was rather hot and sultry! The change in temperature from a cool and pleasant Munnar to humid lowland Kerala was hitting us quite badly. Our shirts were soaked, and we were 'sweating like pigs', as the expression goes, causing Mr Bhaskara Rao to make

the rather understated remark, "You are all sweating?"

But we had no energy to respond, and needed something special to re-energise us. That came in the form of the next sighting.

We saw Ajomon come rushing up to Eldhose, pointing and gesticulating excitedly. Immediately, Eldhose led us onto a side track where we saw, sitting majestically in solo splendour, the stunning Malabar Trogon (male). The Trogon is well-known as one of the shyest birds around, and we were desperately praying that it wouldn't take off before we had a good look at it. At first, the bird was facing away from us, and we could only see the orange-brown back of the bird. But as we, very very slowly, inched closer, the bird turned partly around and gave us the first glimpse of the breath-taking colours that it sports on its front – bright crimson-red underparts with the black throat, square white tail and black-and-grey vermiculated wings. The shutterbugs went wild, with cameras clicking away to glory for the next nearly 15-20 minutes. Surprisingly, the bird just kept sitting there, allowing us to approach closer and closer, then actually walk under the branch where it was sitting and go to the other side (from which side the light was better). I suspect the photographers must have all come away with at least a couple of hundred photographs of the Trogon within those few minutes.

20 minutes with a Malabar Trogon! Things were getting better and better.

Eldhose seems to have worked out a system whereby, while the group is 'oohing' and 'aahing' over one great species, he and his assistants work on locating the *next* great species. I don't know how they do it – I suspect a lot of hard work has gone into it – but the end result is that we get treated to one great sighting after another.



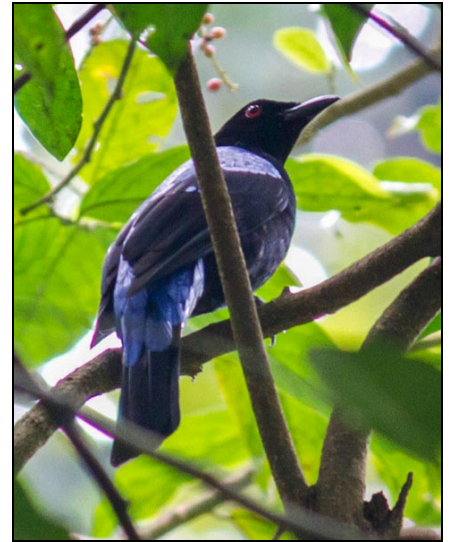
Malabar Trogon male (Photo: Umesh Mani)

We did observe, many times, Eldhose or Ajomon standing away from the group, and listening for calls emanating from the forest. They seemed to be able to identify calls that we could not even hear, and use them to lead us in the right direction. As many of our senior birders keep saying, birding involves more than just *seeing* the bird – we need to learn to be silent, to listen and observe, before we can actually see the bird.

Coming back, we had been hearing the tell-tale hammering of a woodpecker somewhere close by, since quite some time. We started moving away – imagine, walking away from a Malabar Trogon! – trying to locate the woodpecker. There was some urgency (since Thattekad has, among its checklist, the White-bellied Woodpecker which, obviously, we all wanted to see - and who knew which woodpecker was hammering away?) and also some exasperation – since the call was echoing all around, and we just couldn't get a fix on the direction where it was coming from. After spending some time searching, and finally giving up, we started moving up the track when Aparna spotted the very endearing Heart-spotted Woodpecker. But it was on the move and, unfortunately, most of the group did not get to see it. At another spot, some members did see a Black-rumped Flameback, though.

Moving further, Eldhose identified the call of the Blue-throated Flycatcher coming from within the tangle of bushes on the side of the track. Again, this was a species that I think none of the group had seen before, so we were all keen to get a look at the bird. For a change, however, it didn't oblige us – some members got a glimpse of it far within the thicket, but it soon moved away, and did not appear again.

The next dose of excitement was not far away. Just a few minutes' walk ahead led us to a small patch which was buzzing with activity. The first bird to be seen here was the Asian Fairy Bluebird, with its incredible glossy blue-black plumage grabbing the attention even through the thick foliage and very confusing dappling effects of stray sun-rays popping through the canopy. There was, in fact, a pair of the birds, which kept the group engaged for quite some time. Barely a few metres away, we also spotted the Asian Paradise-flycatcher, the Brown-breasted Flycatcher and, a little further, the Orange Minivet. Also seen was a beautiful Jewel Beetle with its metallic green colours.



Asian Fairy Bluebird
(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)



A Jewel Beetle (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)



Brown-breasted Flycatcher
(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

By now, we were tired and famished, and it was time to turn back and head out for lunch. On the way back, some members saw (though not very well, unfortunately) the Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo, the Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker and the Grey Junglefowl. After spending a few more minutes with the Frogmouth which, incredibly, was still sitting in the same bush, we moved out of the sanctuary and onward to lunch.

So much action within a couple of hours! We were happy with what we had

seen so far, but of course, we were hungry for more. For the moment, though, it was time to pay attention to a more literal hunger, which was dealt with via a simple Kerala-style meal of plump boiled rice with various accompaniments.

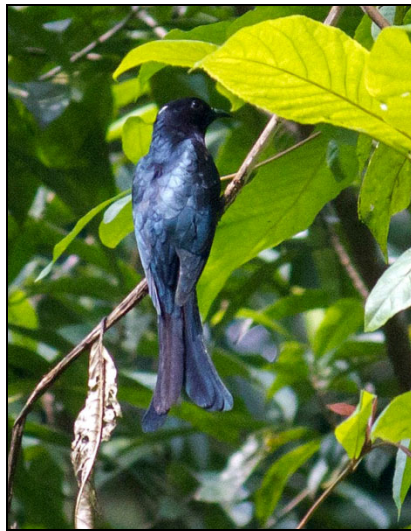
After lunch, we started off on the second leg of the day's birding, at an area called Urulanthanni. *En route*, while crossing a river, we saw some of the usual commoners, like the Lesser Whistling Ducks, White-breasted Kingfisher, Green Bee-eater, Blue Rock Pigeon, Cattle Egret and Little Cormorant. Within a few minutes, we had started on our walk at Urulanthanni. We were greeted by the sighting of the Green Warbler (which, we understood, is a split from the Greenish Warbler), and the repeated calls of a Jungle Owlet which, in spite of a lot of searching, we could not locate.



Black-headed Cuckooshrike
(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

Moving ahead, we hit a patch of frenetic bird activity – within a short while, we were met by the Loten's Sunbird, a gang of Jungle Babblers, a Plum-headed Parakeet and, as if scattered here and there, four types of Drongos (Bronzed, Ashy, Black and Greater Racket-tailed). Of these, the Bronzed Drongo gave great views, staying on its perch for a long time, and allowing the photographers to click away to their hearts' content.

Right after that, we came across a Black-rumped Flameback spiraling its way up a tree trunk, and a Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker playing tag with a pair of Golden-fronted Leafbirds. A few of the lovely Vernal Hanging Parrots entertained us for quite some time with their upside-down antics. Also in the vicinity were the Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Rufous Treepie, several of the beautiful Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, and a pair of White-cheeked Barbets.



Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo
(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)



Bronzed Drongo (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

So many wonderful sightings packed into a short time had whetted our appetite for more, and we moved ahead with great anticipation. We were rewarded by views of the Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Crested Serpent Eagle, and 2-3 of the Malabar Starlings looking venerable with their 'white hair'. Also seen were some Malabar Parakeets, another lifer for most of us.

By now, the intense humidity had taken its toll and several of the senior members of



Golden-fronted Leafbird (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Malabar Starling (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

be a member of the Roller family – but then the bird seemed a much darker blue. When I zoomed in on it, I let out a muted yell – Dollarbird!

We immediately telephoned (since no one had the energy to call out, or walk across physically!) Eldhose and a couple of other members of the group, to try and get them over to see this beautiful bird. Some members, unfortunately, were too far away, or couldn't be reached, but several did get back to where we were, and got to see one of the iconic species of Thattekad.

the group had decided to hang back and bird from where they were, while they waited for the rest of the group to return from the walk. Some of us moved further with the very energetic Eldhose, who led us through some winding paths through the thickly-clustered bushes, and we realised that it would be so easy to get lost in there. Trying to stick together, we still found ourselves drifting apart into smaller sub-groups, each walking at its own pace, though on the same trail.

Some time later, we decided to turn back and rejoin the rest of the members. It was then that I spotted a blue-looking bird perched on the top of a tall tree, a little distance away. My first reaction was 'Roller' – not surprising, as it did finally turn out to



Dollarbird (Photo: Umesh Mani)

The Dollarbird is, apparently, thus named because of the light-blue coin-shaped spots on its outer feathers, which are visible in flight. As far as we were concerned, dollar or not, it was *paisa vasool*!

To my mind, the Dollarbird was surely the star bird of this leg – which honour would probably have gone to the White-bellied Treepie, if only it had not played so hard-to-get! Because it happened again right after, as it had happened earlier – as we walked back from the Dollarbird, we again got tantalising glimpses of the birds flying around just behind the first curtain of trees – thus avoiding being seen properly – and calling (from two different directions!) and confusing the issue even further.

Gowthama, though, somehow managed to get at least a record photo of the Treepie, the only one of the group to do so.

We now started trudging our way back, totally exhausted by the heat and humidity. *En route*, we saw a group of some 10-12 Crested Treeswifts taking it easy on a bare tree – maybe they were also feeling the heat. We certainly missed their characteristic skydiving antics. A Malabar Grey Hornbill and an audible Southern Coucal later, we were out of the sanctuary, dying for a pick-me-up in the form of some *chai* or other nourishment.



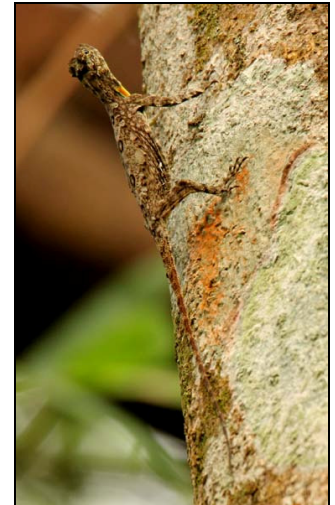
White-bellied Treepie
(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)



Crested Treeswift female (L) and male (R)
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

It was close to 4PM, and just as we began thinking of winding up for the day, Eldhose informed us that he had arranged for some people at the Forest Department to take us around the forest area near the Department office. Groaning inwardly at the thought of more walking, we nevertheless appreciated his effort to plan something extra for us, and ensure that we got in the maximum birding possible in the available time.

When we arrived at the location, two officers from the Forest Department were waiting for us. As soon as we walked in to the campus, we were greeted by the keening call of the Lesser Yellownappe somewhere high up above us. Try as we might, though, we just could not get to see the bird. We were consoled by the sight of a Draco ('flying lizard') making its way up a tree nearby.



Draco (Photo: Umesh Mani)

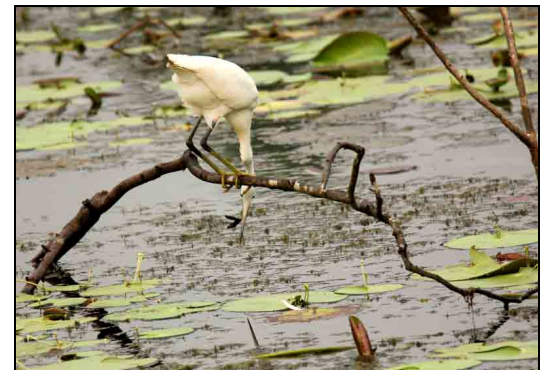


Malabar Parakeet (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Soon, our friendly FD host got us started. We walked past a water body which contained some of the usual suspects – Little Cormorant, Indian Pond Heron, Little Egret, and a few Lesser Whistling Ducks. One 'Cattle Egret' was later identified from photographs as a white-morph Western Reef Egret. Entering a forest trail once more, the first sighting was a small group of Malabar Parakeets busily foraging among the fruiting trees in the canopy above.

Some of them were finally seen at a 'photographable' position, and some of us got a few shots before they moved into the canopy again. This was followed by some 'back-home' birds like the Golden Oriole, Large-billed Crow, Ashy Drongo etc, before we first heard the 'cackling' call of, and then saw, a couple of Malabar Grey Hornbills.

It was getting overcast now, and looked like it might rain any minute. Walking ahead quickly to try and cover a bit more of the area, we walked through a patch of brush and came out on the sides of a large lake. There weren't many birds, though – an unidentified Sandpiper that shot off like a bullet, a lone Common Kingfisher, and a circling Brahminy Kite were the only birds on view.



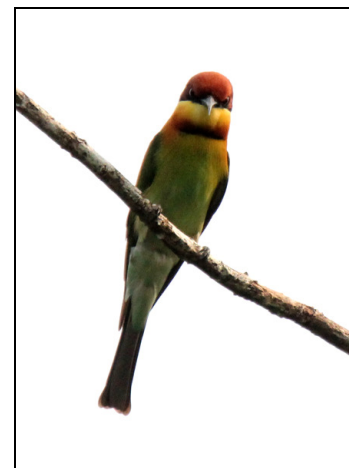
Western Reef Egret (white morph)
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

Meanwhile, I had wandered back to the trail, waiting for the group to start back. I saw a male Grey Junglefowl nonchalantly walk across the trail some distance away, although the light, unfortunately, was too poor by now to get decent photographs. As we moved back, the hosts took us across a vast patch of grassland, but bird activity seemed to have died down – barring a few Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters and a Drongo or two, there wasn't much to see. We were taunted yet again by the calls – without any views – of the White-bellied Treepie, which seemed to subscribe to a policy of backstage rather than onstage appearance.

A few Southern Hill Mynas favoured some of us with a view, but many of us did not get to see it here. We were blasé about it, however, shrugging off the miss with the thought that we had seen it in Munnar earlier.

Suddenly it started pouring, and a period of intense physical activity followed as many members made a dash for safety. Some serious coordination was also required before we could link up with the members who had gone missing in the process.

Thanking our hosts, we finally left for the hotel, coming to the end of a tiring but very productive day, peppered by lots of birding action and several lovely sightings. Tomorrow would be another day!



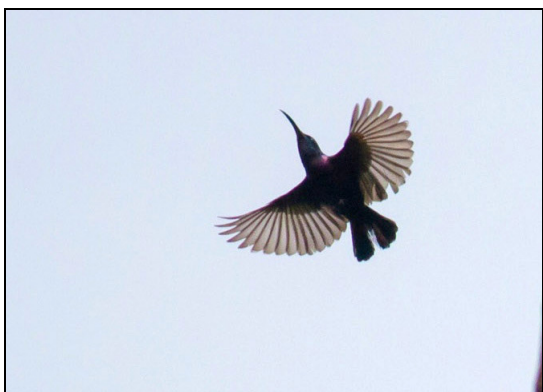
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater
(Photo: Umesh Mani)



Malabar Grey Hornbill (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Though many birds seemed to be congregating on the trees nearby, it was the Jungle Babbler that ate first, followed by the White-cheeked Barbets, a pair of Malabar Grey Hornbills, and a Rufous Treepie. There was also a Black-rumped Flameback nearby, though we did not see it actually feed on the fruit.

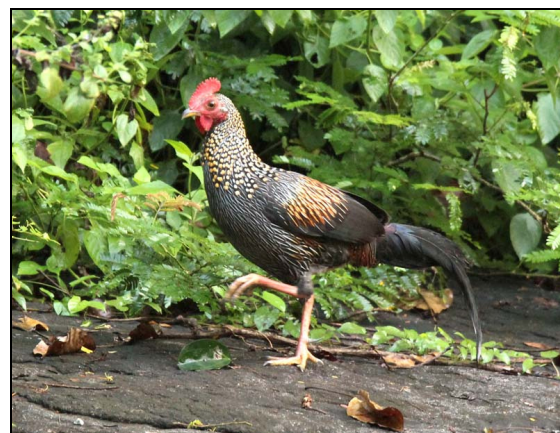
The photographers, of course, took lots of photographs, but the others too enjoyed what was quite an interesting experience. Whatever the merits and demerits of feeding birds, one has to appreciate the effort and commitment of the family in providing for the birds. It is also to be noted that they provide only natural food like fruit, and not cooked food like rice, as is a common practice in many Indian households.



Loten's Sunbird (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

On day-4, aching bones and creaking joints notwithstanding, we made an early start, since we had only about half a day available at Thattekad before we had to leave for our next halt, Cochin.

The day started with Eldhose taking us to his home where, apparently, members of his family have been feeding birds with bananas and other fruit, every morning at 7AM sharp, since the past 10 years! *En route*, on a large rock we saw a squirrel eating something, and there were also a couple of White-cheeked Barbets. However, Eldhose soon rushed us off to the house, as feeding time was nearing. He told us that the birds were like kids, raising a clamour if the food was not available on time, and made sure to have us all settled in before the time came to feed the birds. He told us that there was a clear hierarchy as to who would eat first and who would come later, which we saw in practice soon afterwards.



Grey Junglefowl male (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Starting off from there, we stopped at the above-mentioned rock for a little while, and saw a Grey Junglefowl pair walk across. We saw the squirrel, and a Black-rumped Flameback, feed on some food that had been put out. Also in attendance on nearby electric wires were several Chestnut-headed and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, a family of four White-cheeked Barbets, and a Laughing Dove.

By now, though, we were restless to get back into the forest. Today's plan was, first, an area called Bhoothathankettu, which turned out to be as bird-rich as the trails of the previous day had been.

The first birds we saw as we walked in were three superb species – a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, and sharing a branch, the Flame-throated Bulbul and the Yellow-browed Bulbul!



Brown Shrike

(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

A few minutes later, Eldhose took us to a small clearing in the forest, surrounded by tall trees. Standing amid thick grass all around, we were spending more time checking for leeches than looking for birds.

However, that lasted only for a couple of minutes – till the first bird sighting, that is! Starting off with a Brown Shrike and a Black-hooded Oriole, we were soon ticking off some rather interesting species – Green Imperial Pigeon, Large Cuckooshrike, Malabar Starling, Southern Hill Myna, and so on. However, our eyes were peeled for the ‘other’ iconic species of Thattekad, and as if to oblige us, it – or rather, a pair of ‘it’s – soon made an appearance. That’s right – I am referring to the Black Baza!



Yellow-browed Bulbul (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Indian Golden Oriole female (Photo: Umesh Mani)

As soon as it came on the scene, there was a collective sigh of awe at the sheer beauty of the bird. Initially, of course, we saw it overflying, but it circled a little and soon perched on a tree. Binoculars and cameras went into action, and once we could see it properly, with its distinctive plumage and the trademark black crest, the only sounds were the ‘oohs’ and

‘aahs’ of the group!



Black Baza (Photo: Umesh Mani)

A few minutes, and what sounded like a few hundred photographs, later, people slowly started paying a little attention to other birds which were, until then, ‘also present’. There was a Lesser Yellownappe, again missed by many of us, the Plum-headed Parakeet, the elusive White-bellied Treepie (again just a glimpse!), and an Asian Paradise-flycatcher. A Flame-throated Bulbul gave good views, though we had to bend and stretch to see it sitting inside a low bush. A Blue-faced Malkoha also marked attendance, as did the Southern Coucal (again, just heard, not seen). Also, somewhat incongruously, a River Tern.

Meanwhile, the Bazas had been active, taking off, circling and perching, again and again. This gave a good opportunity to see them well, though they were quite high up in the trees.

By now, it was getting to be time to move on. As we walked back, we first heard, and then got glimpses of, the White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, and also saw a Large-billed Leaf Warbler. These birds quite nicely rounded off the first leg of the day.



Flame-throated Bulbul (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Large-billed Leaf Warbler
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

Driving towards the Idamalayar Reserve Forest, we decided to have *en route* a 'quick' breakfast that turned out to be 'not so quick' – probably the small roadside restaurant had never had a gang of 20-odd hungry birders descend on it before, as they were obviously unprepared for the sudden spike in consumption! So we had to wait a while before all of us were fed satisfactorily.

We also had Ajitkumarsaab and some other members appreciating an ingenious contraption in the kitchen, wherein the staff had modified a large vessel in such a way that they could separately boil water, heat milk, and make tea, all at the same time! A happy discussion on 'native innovation' followed, before someone suddenly reminded the group that we were yet to reach Idamalayar! That got us reoriented, and we soon moved off.

Reaching Idamalayar, the first thing we saw were some gigantic droppings, which reminded us that we were still in wild elephant country. A little later, we saw the first birds of this forest – Southern Hill Myna, Crimson-backed (or Small) Sunbird and an Asian Fairy Bluebird. Across a deep valley, quite far away, there was a lot of activity – we saw an unidentified Leafbird fly across, the beautiful Orange Minivet, Bronzed and Ashy Drongos, a Vernal Hanging Parrot, and some small unidentifiable birds (one of which was later identified from photographs as a Philippine Shrike).



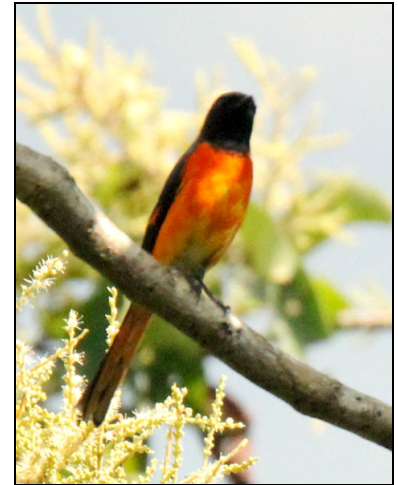
Crimson-backed Sunbird (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Philippine Shrike (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Orange Minivet female
(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)



Orange Minivet male
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

Also seen – too far away, sadly – was another special species – the Grey-headed Bulbul. With its very restricted range, we had been hoping to see and photograph this species during this trip, but we had to be satisfied with just a glimpse of the beautiful bird.

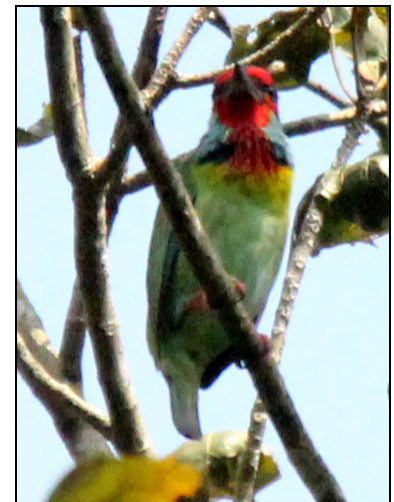
We decided to walk a little further, and were rewarded by the sighting of the lovely Malabar Barbet, as also an Asian Brown Flycatcher.

By now, the sun was high, and it was really hot. We also needed to make a start for Cochin. So we turned back and, as if in farewell, we heard a Common Hawk Cuckoo give out its haunting call.

Dropping Eldhose off on the way, we left, sad that we had such limited time here, but happy that we had been able to see a good cross-section of Kerala's precious bird diversity.



Indian Golden Oriole female (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Malabar Barbet
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

Chavakkad Beach & Enamavu Kole

(Day Five)

Geethanjali Rajaram



White-cheeked Barbet (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Two exciting days of bird watching, guided by Eldhose, had whetted our appetites for more. Can any birder ever be satisfied with what he or she sees in a day? After a hot cup of coffee or tea to jolt us awake after scant hours of sleep, and a hearty breakfast to sustain us, we boarded the Tempo Traveler. We had been spending so much time in the vehicle that it had become something of a second home to us. Our trip that day was to Chavakkad Beach and Enamavu Kole.

Though we were more than ready, we encountered a minor problem - there was some confusion regarding the route, which was soon cleared up by Mr. Haragopal. Yours truly (affectionately christened 'Geetha Akka') played translator, stepping in now and again to help overcome the language barrier. The driver Shah Jehan, named after the most romantic Mughal Emperor, was one of the best I had seen in a long time. An amiable personality, he calmly drove through the trickiest of paths with a smile.

We drove along narrow roads; one time, we even had to go off the road a time or two to accommodate a bus travelling in the opposite direction! Apart from that minor hiccup, the drive went smoothly. We found ourselves driving along the coast for a large part of the trip, right next to the sea. There were many beautiful sights on that drive, the beautiful houses with their red-tiled roofs, the little shops selling vegetables and bananas that one could spy now and again, and even the roads themselves, lined with coconut palms.

We were passing through a sleepy little town, just coming alive, when I gave in to temptation, turned my eyes to the sky and started searching for birds. I squinted, my search hindered a little by the rising sun and sleep-deprived eyes. Still, I was not surprised by the variety of birds I could spot. They are all around us, if only we take a moment to stop and quietly observe. I saw all kinds of birds, the humble House Crow, Rock Pigeon, Brahminy Kite, Black Kite, White-breasted Kingfisher, Indian Cormorant, and Pond Heron amongst others. I jotted down all their names hurriedly, lest I forget them. The most interesting of them, however was a Swift which we couldn't identify. It had a whitish underbelly, and a greyish upper part. With just that information, it could have been a White-rumped Needletail or a Brown-backed Needletail. Normally I would have requested Umesh or Gowthama to capture the bird with their cameras, but being in a moving vehicle made that impossible.

On the way to Chavakkad beach, we had to take a ferry and cross the Periyar River. The Tempo Traveler simply drove onto the ferry with the eighteen of us still aboard. We promptly stepped out to enjoy the view and the fresh air, but it wasn't long before we whipped out our binoculars to spot birds. We weren't disappointed; we saw Little Egrets, Brahminy Kites, Little Cormorants, Intermediate Egrets, House Crows and River Terns...Once again, I took care to jot down their names; recording which species one spots and where is a very important habit for a birding enthusiast.

When we reached Chavakkad beach, the sun was high up and it was too hot to enjoy birding. We headed straight to a small wayside shop at the beach to combat the heat with tasty Chocobar ice-creams or coconut water. We split up after that - some members visited the toddy shop out of curiosity, and some walked around to see if they could spot any birds. We did see a family of Black Drongos, some Common Mynas, House Crows, and a few Swallows/Swifts circling above. The birds created a ruckus, calling out excitedly as they wheeled and darted overhead.

We soon got tired of the view as there weren't many birds around. We realised we would have to go the wetlands (Kole is the name for wetlands in Kerala) to have a decent chance of spotting some birds.

We boarded the bus again, and started driving towards Enamavu Kole. It wasn't long after that, that I spotted a Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo perched on a coconut tree. From within the Tempo Traveler, the angle afforded to me was limited, and I was quite convinced that the bird was a Lesser Racket-tail. To my embarrassment, it turned out to be the common, if beautiful, Black Drongo. But no one ridiculed me for my mistake and they were willing to teach and share their knowledge of birds without making me feel small. As a newcomer, I feel that this welcoming and generous spirit is the best part of the BSAP community.

After the rather sparse bird sightings at the beach, we were only too happy to see that Enamavu Kole was teeming with birds. The beautiful sight of a family of Common Coots, complete with small chicks, set the tone for the birding session. On one side of where we were, there was a water body, and on the other, a green paddyfield. The location could not have been better! Excited voices from the others in my group had me turn towards the paddyfield; there was a Eurasian Marsh Harrier flying over the field at a distance.

As happens quite often on our excursions, Shafaatji kicked off the process of identifying various birds. Cameras clicked continuously as we spotted a flock of White-rumped Munias, a Rufous Treepie, and a Golden Oriole close by. We spotted a distant Marsh Harrier sitting amidst the green grass. Strangely, the bird remained quiet, and did not move from its position till we boarded the bus. Maybe there was something wrong with its health?



White-rumped Munia (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Eurasian Marsh Harrier (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Moving on, I was delighted to see several Terns sitting on a high tension wire, as if posing for us. We were afforded ample opportunity to see their features through binoculars and distinguish between the River Terns and the Whiskered Terns. Not long after, I was asked to look at a lone heron in the paddyfield and identify it. To my surprise, and delight, it was a Purple Heron!

I also noticed a Darter lifting its snake-like neck from the water every once in a while to take a breath. As we headed back to the bus, all chattering in excited voices, we spotted one last bird, a White-breasted Waterhen that was disturbed by all the commotion.



A flock of Terns (Photo: Umesh Mani)

waves floating us gently off our sore feet, and setting us down on blissfully soft sand, even in the midst of a heated game of volleyball...After that refreshing bath, we called it a day and left for the hotel.



Darter (Photo: Umesh Mani)

By now, the only thing on our minds after that satisfying field trip was lunch! One hearty lunch later, we headed towards Cherai Beach in Vypin Islands which is twenty-five kilometers from Kochi. We reached at 4:30PM and headed straight to the beach for some well-deserved relaxation. Some of us headed straight for the water while others sat on the parapet, soaking in the beautiful sight of waves breaking on the shore and letting the cool ocean breeze wash away their tiredness. We enjoyed the soothing sensation of soft

It was only 6 PM when we left, so, naturally, the day did not end there. While some of us decided to relax at the hotel, the others, the youngsters, decided to explore the Lulu Mall, Asia's second biggest Mall. While there, we even played kids and rode on a toy train! With that, we ended the day on a high note, and returned to the hotel. It was time to get a few hours rest: we would be up at 5 AM the next morning for our next birding adventure.

Kumarakom, Alleppey & Kadamakkudy

(Day Six & Seven)

Dr Jayati Mitra

It was a pleasant morning at Ernakulam as we sipped coffee, ready to start our journey towards Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary. During the last few days, we had had a hectic tour, climbing up and down the hilly terrains and spotting many endemic Malabar birds, which were lifers for most of us. But at Ernakulam, we again saw the ubiquitous House Sparrows and Oriental Magpie Robins foraging near the tea stall. The call of the White-cheeked Barbet was instantly recognisable – a repeated *kutroo...*, *kutroo...* - and the bird was seen perched on the treetop amidst the dense foliage. Unlike the Coppersmith Barbet, this bird has a bold white cheek patch and a prominent white supercilium. It had been our constant companion throughout the tour.

We crossed over the Kumbalam bridge and stopped over for a while. The water body seen alongside was a part of the Wembanad Lake, fed with fresh water from the hills. A check dam has been constructed to prevent the salt water from contaminating the lake and hence to enable paddy cultivation. The lake was partially choked with water hyacinth. A mixed flock of swallows were flying and circling overhead, and a lone Little Cormorant was sitting quietly at the edge on the far end of the water body.

Soon, we continued our journey and ended up at the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary. The sanctuary has been declared as a Ramsar site and is one of the largest gathering place for Black-crowned Night Herons. It is also a breeding site for Darters and Black-headed Ibises. Before entering the sanctuary, we were delighted to feast on delicious hot *appam* and *puttu* at the local eatery, while watching the Jungle Mynas and Green Bee-eaters flying around outside.

We walked straight into the sanctuary on the cobbled path and our first sighting was a pair of Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, with their long wire-like tails ending in small knobs. These birds are fairly common in this forest. Our attention was diverted by the harsh call of the Rufous Treepie and we could vividly see its long greyish-black-tipped tail.

A narrow stretch of water ran parallel to our path across the dense mangrove forest. Rubber trees and different varieties of creepers blocked the sunlight as we made our way forward. The forest was full of Asian Koels, whose calls were so soothing to our ears. The tiny sunbirds flying around were smaller than the Purple Sunbird and had a striking deep crimson colouration on the mantle. These were the Crimson-backed Sunbirds endemic to the Western Ghats. A small flutter among the foliage drew our attention and some long white streamers were visible – an Asian Paradise-flycatcher was hiding in the bush. We saw the bright yellow colour of the Golden Oriole flashing across the treetops, and Large-billed Crows were present in large numbers. By this time we had reached almost to the other end and it was time to return and explore the backwaters. Before leaving we viewed a highly informative documentary film prepared by the Forest Department.



Greater Racket-tailed Drongo

(Photo: Umesh Mani)

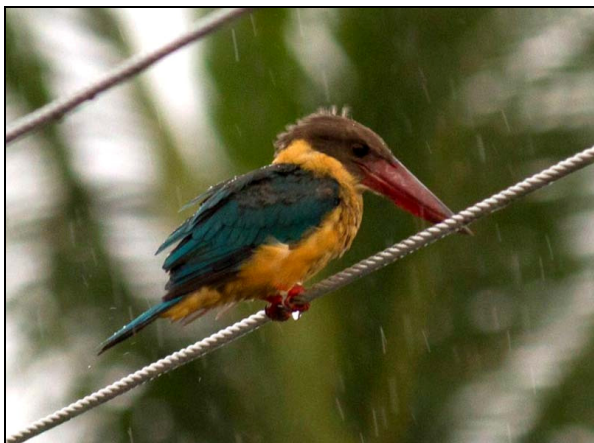


Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

Moving on, we reached the Alappuzha jetty and boarded a motor boat anchored at the backwaters. About a dozen Whiskered Terns were flying around as we moved along. The more enthusiastic young birders climbed on to the upper deck to have a better view while the rest enjoyed their fermented coconut drink while being comfortably seated below. There was water everywhere, separated by narrow stretches of land inhabited by the local population. Gradually the sun rose up high in the sky. Not many birds were seen except for the Brahminy Kites, which were soaring higher and higher and fading away from sight. These birds are found mainly in coastal areas and wetlands, and can be distinguished from Black Kites by their reddish-brown wings and a contrasting white-coloured head and breast. The tail is also rounded and not forked. A Common Kingfisher created some excitement but otherwise it was a monotonous ride.

At noon the weather changed abruptly. Black clouds filled the sky as we halted for lunch. Starting with a few drops, the rain poured as we savoured the steaming local rice with fish fry. A pet Brahminy Kite added some flavour to our mood. After the rainfall ceased, we sailed along and there was renewed activity in nature. Mixed flocks of Barn, Red-rumped and Wire-tailed Swallows in huge numbers filled the sky, circling and gorging on the hordes of flying insects which had come out due to the heavy downpour. This sight was

enjoyable no doubt, but we badly wanted to see something more and this time we were rewarded. The surprise came as we looked at the overhead wire across the water. A big-sized kingfisher was sitting on it and its long stout pink bill and greenish blue plumage gave away its identity.



Stork-billed Kingfisher (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

By now, the light was fading and we were on our return trip. The sound of laughter reached our ears on the upper deck – our friend Surekha was trying her hand at navigating the boat and everyone seemed to relish the moment.

Soon after disembarking at the jetty, we observed some fluttering over the palm trees at the approaching islands. A Black-rumped Flameback was pecking on the stump, and a Black-hooded Oriole was flying from one tree to another. The latter has a totally black head and neck, unlike the Golden Oriole, and the contrasting colour looked beautiful. Soon, we reached the city and became busy with shopping. After all, tomorrow we would be leaving Kerala!

On the last day, our birding destination was Kadamakkudy, a small village near Ernakulam. We travelled via Kothad on a misty morning. Amidst the banana and coconut plantations, we saw many Indian Pond Herons moving around. Kadamakkudy had some paddyfields, and a large water-body where we sighted the Large Cormorant. Flocks of Scaly-breasted Munias were feeding on ripe grains. At the same place, Ashy Prinia, Zitting Cisticola and Blyth's Reed Warbler were also seen. A huge flock of Barn Swallows was lined up on the overhead electric cable.



Whiskered Tern (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

The Stork-billed Kingfisher, known for its presence in the Wembanad lake, was silently trying to stalk its prey. We turned the boat 360° and stretched our necks to get a glimpse from all angles amidst the clicking of shutters. After satisfying ourselves to the fullest we again moved further along.

A few Red-wattled Lapwings and Whiskered Terns were flying above but the ripples in the water drew our attention. We were in for another interesting sight – a Darter was stretching its long neck from the water and diving again and again. For some time, we kept following its hide-and-seek game in and out of the water till it disappeared from sight.



Darter (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)



Osprey (Photo: Umesh Mani)

All of a sudden, a pair of Ospreys came around, diving very low over the field. They kept chasing each other for quite some time and faded away into the distance. This bird is diurnal and preys on fish; the most interesting characteristic is that it can reverse its outer toe to catch its prey effectively with two toes in front and two behind. From the underside the head and wings are mostly white while its upper parts are coloured brown.

Now it was time to return. All these days, so much had been seen and enjoyed, and definitely during parting time we felt sad. At last, we bade good-bye to Shahjahan, our driver, who had become an integral part of our group, and boarded the train for our return journey, hoping to come back soon and enjoy new experiences.

Complete list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Kerala Laughingthrush	<i>Trochaloxyron fairbanki</i>
2	Blue-capped Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola cinclorhynchus</i>
3	Nilgiri Pipit	<i>Anthus nilghiriensis</i>
4	Indian Blackbird	<i>Turdus simillimus</i>
5	White-bellied Shortwing (a.k.a. White-bellied Blue Robin or Nilgiri Blue Robin)	<i>Myiomela major</i>
6	Malabar Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyroceros griseus</i>
7	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striata</i>
8	Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
9	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
10	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
11	Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
12	Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
13	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
14	Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
15	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
16	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
17	Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
18	Western Reef Egret (white morph)	<i>Egretta gularis</i>
19	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
20	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
21	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
22	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
23	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
24	Black Baza	<i>Aviceda leuphotes</i>
25	Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
26	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
27	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
28	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
29	Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malaiensis</i>
30	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
31	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
32	Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
33	Indian Black-lored Tit	<i>Parus aplonotus</i>
34	Grey Junglefowl	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>
35	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
36	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
37	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
38	Indian River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>
39	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
40	Nilgiri Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba elphinstonii</i>

41	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
42	Vernal Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus vernalis</i>
43	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>
44	Malabar Parakeet (a.k.a. Blue-winged Parakeet)	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>
45	Southern Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis parroti</i>
46	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
47	Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>
48	Sri Lankan Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus moniliger</i>
49	Crested Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
50	Malabar Trogon	<i>Harpactes fasciatus</i>
51	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
52	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
53	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
54	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
55	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
56	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
57	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
58	White-cheeked Barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>
59	Malabar Barbet	<i>Megalaima malabarica</i>
60	Nilgiri Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>
61	Indian Pitta (call heard)	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
62	Lesser Yellownappe	<i>Picus chlorolophus</i>
63	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos nanus</i>
64	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
65	Heart-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Hemicircus canente</i>
66	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (call heard)	<i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis</i>
67	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
68	Hill Swallow	<i>Hirundo domicola</i>
69	Ashy Woodswallow	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>
70	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
71	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
72	Orange Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
73	Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>
74	Flame-throated Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus gularis</i>
75	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
76	Square-tailed Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes ganeesa</i>
77	Yellow-browed Bulbul	<i>Acritillas indica</i>
78	Grey-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus priocephalus</i>
79	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
80	Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
81	Asian Fairy Bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>
82	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
83	Philippine Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus lucionensis</i>

84	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
85	Malabar Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis sylvicola</i>
86	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>
87	Large Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>
88	Malabar Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus horsfieldii</i>
89	Scaly Thrush	<i>Zoothera dauma</i>
90	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
91	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
92	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
93	Tytler's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus tytleri</i>
94	Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
95	Large-billed Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i>
96	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
97	Jungle Owlet (call heard)	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>
98	Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
99	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
100	Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
101	Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>
102	Black-and-orange Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula nigrorufa</i>
103	Asian Paradise-flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
104	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa latirostris</i>
105	Brown-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>
106	Nilgiri Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias albicaudatus</i>
107	Blue-throated Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis rubeculoides</i>
108	White-bellied Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis pallipes</i>
109	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
110	Common Hawk Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>
111	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
112	Loten's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>
113	Crimson-backed Sunbird (a.k.a. Small Sunbird)	<i>Leptocoma minima</i>
114	Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
115	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
116	White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
117	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
118	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
119	Malabar Starling	<i>Sturnia malabarica blythii</i>
120	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
121	Lesser Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>
122	Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>
123	Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
124	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
125	Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
126	Bronzed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>

127	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
128	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
129	White-bellied Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta leucogastra</i>
130	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
131	Indian Jungle Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
132	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
133	Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo	<i>Surniculus dicruroides</i>
134	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
135	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 3 March 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 15th March 2015: Pocharam. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Pocharam is a large reservoir on the Manjira River, about 70km downstream from Manjira Barrage. The reservoir is situated amidst undulating hills, with dry deciduous forest and scrub jungle. The lake varies in extent from 15,000 to 20,000 ha depending upon the season and fluctuations in rainfall. The lake is known to support a wide variety of resident, as well as migratory waterfowl. More than 53 species of waterfowl are listed for the area. Specialities include Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill and Bar-headed Goose.

Members are requested to be on time as it is a long, two-hour drive. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

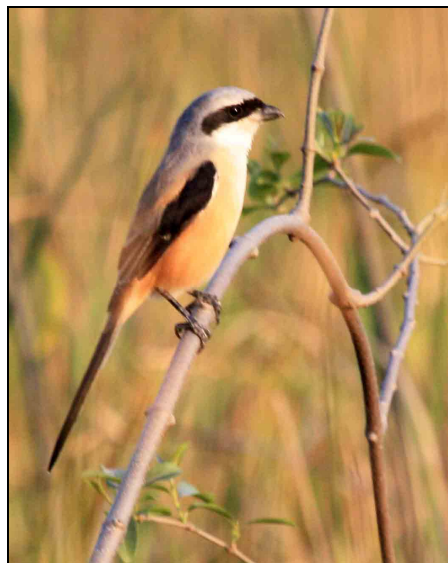
INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Mr Ashwin Naidu on "Community-based conservation of the endangered fishing cats and their mangrove habitat in A.P."

Tuesday, 3rd March 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Mr. Ashwin Naidu is an NRI based at University of Arizona, USA and is involved with research on the Fishing Cat, which is listed in IUCN's endangered list. He is the co-founder of "Fishing Cat Conservancy".

Report – Hutti Gold Mines, Karnataka

Text and photos: Dr G Samuel Sukumar



Long-tailed Shrike

I had an opportunity to visit the Hutti Gold Mines Ltd (HGML), a company located in the state of Karnataka, which is engaged in the mining and production of gold, as part of my work. HGML was first established as Hyderabad Gold Mines in 1947. With the closing of Kolar Gold Fields in 2001, HGML is now the only

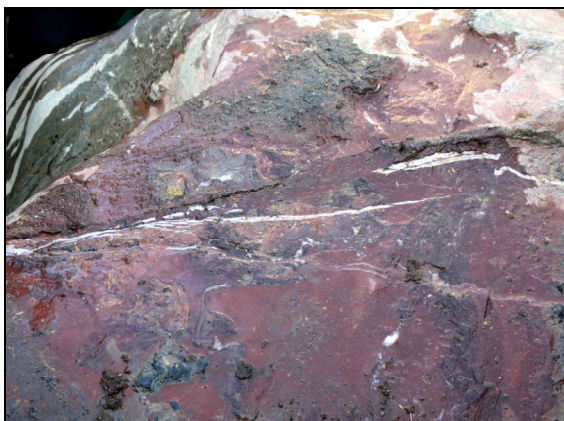
company in India which produces gold by mining and processing the gold ore. Owned by the Government of Karnataka, HGML has two plants located in Hutti and Chitradurga. HGML mines gold from its main gold mine located in Hutti and other satellite mines.



Disseminated Gold (L) and Gold Nuggets (R)

The mines used by HGML are mainly located in the Hutti-Muski precambrian greenstone geological belt which contains both readily extractable native gold and gold-bearing sulphides. These mines in total produce about 3 tonnes of gold a year. It has gold ore reserves of about 31.02 million tonnes which could last for about 60 years and yield about 150.4 tonnes of gold.

At Gogi area there is a fairly large deposit of Uranium Pitchblende in brecciated dolomite. The company, however, has not been able to exploit this, owing to local resistance stemming from the fear of radiation, although in reality, radiation starts only after the milling processes - Nature has its own safeguards! Once the mining activity starts, this would become one of the largest deposits in India.



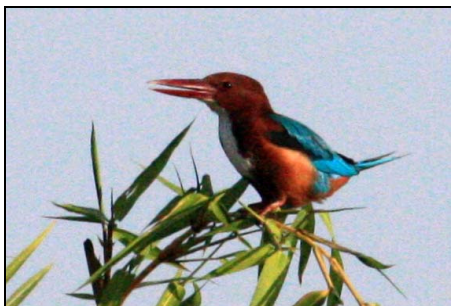
Brecciated dolomite host for Uranium Pitchblende (L) and Rare Earth Minerals (R)

At Mincheri there is an occurrence of Rare Earth Elements (REE), which has to be exploited due to the stoppage of exports from China and a resultant shortage in the world market.

LaLu elements in short - along with scandium and yttrium; most of these elements are radioactive.

As these Rare Earth Elements are mainly used in computer parts, it has become quite essential to locate and mine them. This includes elements starting from Lanthanum to Lutetium - called

Contrary to the general perception of mines being locations that cause immense damage to biodiversity, and hence being unsuitable for birds, the Hutti Gold Mines premises has a fairly large number of species that are seen quite regularly.



White-breasted Kingfisher



Purple Swamphen



Cattle Egret



Blyth's Reed Warbler



Black-headed Ibis



Laughing Dove



Brahminy Starling



Scaly-breasted Munia



Indian Grey Hornbill



Purple Heron

A list of birds that I have observed there, is given below:

S. No	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
2	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	<i>Eremopterix grisea</i>
3	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
4	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>

5	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
6	Black Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
7	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
8	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
9	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
10	Blue Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia intermedia</i>
11	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>
12	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
13	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
14	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
15	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
16	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
17	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
18	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
19	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
20	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>
21	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
22	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>
23	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
24	Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
25	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>
26	Large Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
27	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
28	Laughing Dove (Little Brown Dove)	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
29	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
30	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
31	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
32	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
33	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
34	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
35	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
36	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
37	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
38	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
39	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
40	Rosy Starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>
41	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
42	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
43	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
44	Unid. Swallow	
45	White-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>

Variations in the breeding season of the Indian Courser

Humayun Taher, Bindu Madhavi Racherla, Sharada Annamaraju, M Lawrence

The Indian Courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*) is a species of courser found in mainland South Asia, mainly in the plains bounded by the Ganges and Indus river system. Like other coursers, it is a ground bird that can be found in small groups as they forage for insects in dry open semi-desert country. The species occurs in dry stony, scrubby or rocky country (but rarely on sandy terrain) from the Indus valley east of Bangladesh and south to the tip of Peninsular India. Other areas where they are commonly seen include the Deccan plateau and the arid regions of north-western India in Rajasthan and Gujarat. It is resident in some areas but makes local movements.

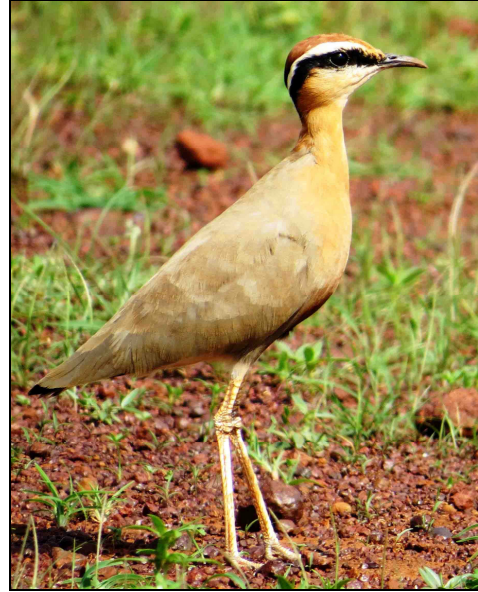
In January 2014, we saw a pair of Indian Coursers behaving in a manner which led us to suspect the presence of a nest. One bird was seen crouching on the ground in a manner very suggestive of incubation. However, as the birds were showing signs of uneasiness, we moved away and did not attempt any approach to verify the presence of a nest or eggs. Subsequently, this sighting remained recorded in the notebook, but we did not pursue the matter.



Indian Courser

Towards the end of January this year, we again saw a pair of Indian Coursers in a similar situation. However, this time the birds were accompanied by two small chicks (which did not appear to be more than a couple of days old, as they were still unsteady on their feet). Again, bearing in mind the vulnerability of the young birds, we refrained from close approach and moved away as soon as the adults started to show signs of uneasiness.

This time, we looked through the Handbook of the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent (Ali & Ripley, 1987) and found the breeding season mentioned as "...chiefly March to August. Some seasonal variation." Wikipedia mentions that "The birds breed mainly from March to August. Records exist for mid-May in southern India and Sri Lanka and mid-April in Darbhanga." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_courser).



Indian Courser

It is interesting to note that both records of breeding (one possible and one confirmed sighting) from this part of the country seem to be much earlier than the given season. If we match the probable incubation of mid-January 2014 against the chicks seen this year, it seems quite possible that the bird was indeed actually incubating. We would be keen to learn if other members have noted possible breeding behaviour of the species and, if so, whether any dates are available. It is possible that the breeding season differs in the south, or it could be that availability of prey/suitable habitat may have influenced the birds to change their breeding season locally.

More information from members would be extremely interesting to us!

Report – Ringed Bar-headed goose at Osman Sagar

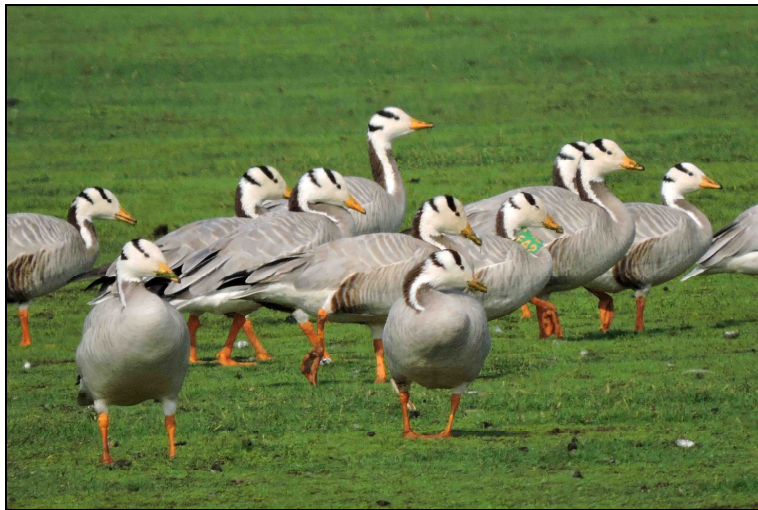
Text and photos: Y Prakash Rao



Bar-headed Goose flock

Bar-headed Geese have always fascinated the scientific and the birding community for the kind of journeys they undertake year after year under testing conditions and displaying extreme levels of endurance. These birds breed in mountain lakes in Central Asian countries and winter in India.

On 7th March 2015, one such flock consisting of about 450 members was found to be wintering in the Osman Sagar Lake on the south-western edge of Hyderabad. Among this flock was one goose with a green-coloured ring on the neck, with markings “F42”.



Ringed Bar-headed Goose F42 amidst the flock

On enquiring about the antecedents of the ringed goose, Mr. Nyambayar Batbayar, PhD, Director Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia, confirmed that the bird was ringed on 15th July 2013 at Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake which is around 500 km west of Ulan Bator, the capital city of Mongolia. He also confirmed that this was the first report of a sighting since it was ringed.

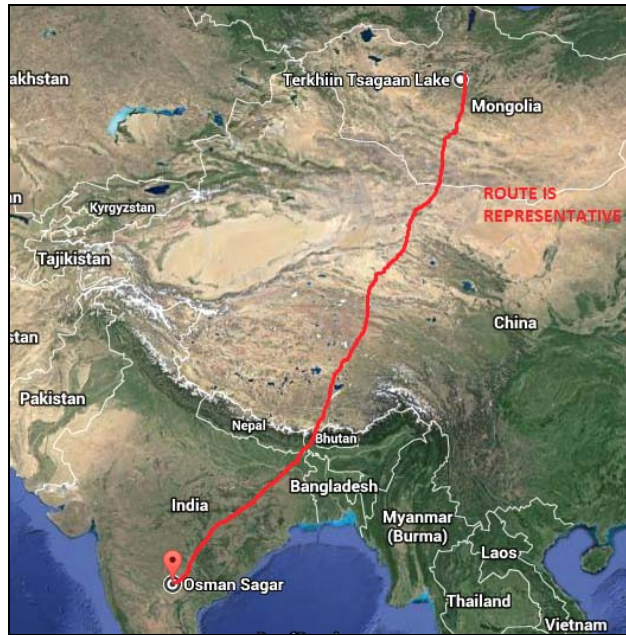
The coordinates of the start point and destination are as below.

Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake	48 09 17 N 99 40 12E
Osman Sagar Lake	17 22 30 N 78 17 21 E

Since one degree change in latitude equals to 111 km on ground, the journey towards India as the crow flies, translates to 3930 km. However, since the goose does not fly as the crow does (and

literally so!), the actual distance travelled is much greater. This is due to the fact that the geese are continuously drifting due to winds and may have to alter course due to weather, terrain and logistical reasons. While the Great Circle route to Hyderabad lies to the west of the Mt Everest, actual observations have shown that they actually cross the Himalayas to the East between Bhutan and Nepal.

Lake Terkhiin Tsagaan is at an elevation of 6746 ft, which is a little higher than Darjeeling. Thus the birds are acclimatized to this altitude since they are born here. The average elevation of terrain during the south bound journey varies between 6000-10000 ft for the first 1000 km in Mongolia, going up to 16500 ft for the next 1000 km (Himalayan crossing) and thereafter, abruptly reducing to as low as sea level, depending on the destination of the flock.



Map of route taken by ringed Bar-headed Goose F42

The southward migration happens between October and December, while the north-bound journey takes place from March to May each year. Since this bird was ringed in 2013, we can safely assume that this bird would have completed one migration during 2013-14 post ringing.

I hope that more birds are sighted in future to help understand the migration patterns and help achieve the objectives framed by the scientific community.

Bird Humour

(contributed by JVD Moorty)

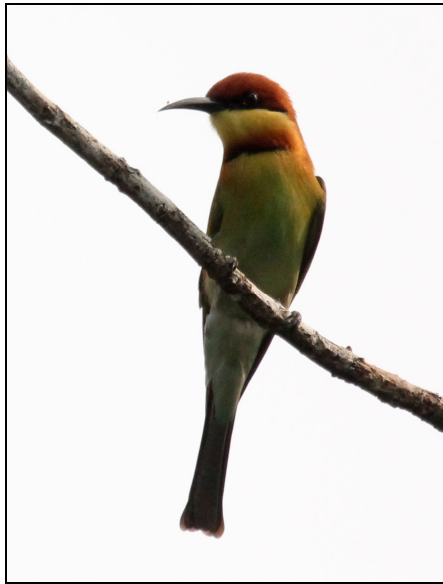


(From Times of India, date not available)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (*Merops leschenaulti*)



Chestnut-headed Bee-eater

(Thattakad, Kerala, 11-11-2014)

Order: Coraciiformes
Family: Meropidae
Genus: *Merops*
Species: *M. leschenaulti*
Size: 18-20 cm

Description & distribution: A near-passerine member of the bee-eater family Meropidae, the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, like its other 'cousins', is richly-coloured. A slender bird, it is predominantly green, with some blue towards the lower belly and rump. It has a chestnut forehead, crown, nape, mantle, ear coverts and a narrow throat band. The area between bill and throat band is pale yellow. It has black lores that continue as a band under the eyes and ear coverts. Below the throat band, after a narrow black and indistinct yellow strip, the underparts are greenish right up to the vent and under tail-coverts, where it is tipped with blue. The upperparts, including lower back, wing coverts, primaries, secondaries and tertiaries, are green. The central tail feathers of the otherwise green tail are bluish. Rump and upper tail-coverts are pale shining blue. The thin, curved bill is black, and the legs and feet are blue-grey. Eyes are red with a black eye-ring. Sexes are alike, but young birds are duller in colour, and the crown and mantle may show green or variable chestnut-brown. As compared to the other bee-eaters, one key difference is that the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater does not have the two elongated central tail feathers.

The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater is distributed across the Indian sub-continent and nearby regions, across to South-east Asia, including Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The Andaman sub-species, *M. l. andamanensis*, is slightly larger, and has black-to-

darkish-black bill, legs and claws. The irises are crimson. The Javan sub-species, *M. l. quinticolor*, on the other hand, has no chestnut throat band - it shows yellow from bill down to the black pectoral band, and the tail is blue.

Behaviour: The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater is a resident breeder across most of its range. It prefers edges or clearings in sub-tropical open woodland or light forest, often near water. It may also be seen in coastal scrub, along riversides, or even in large gardens and plantations. It is usually found singly or in small groups, though it may feed or roost in communal groups. The diet predominantly consists of bees, wasps, hornets, butterflies, dragonflies, grasshoppers and other insects, which the bird hawks from the air during aerial sorties from an open perch. They are also known to splash into water and pick up aquatic insects.

Courtship display is not particularly spectacular, but it includes raising of crown and throat feathers, spreading and quivering of tail, wing-raising and, occasionally, aerial displays. Vocalizations become louder, and courtship feeding may occur too.

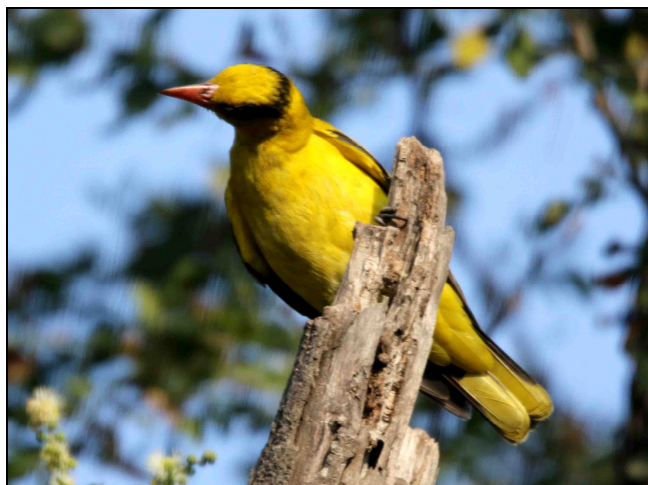
Nesting: The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater breeds from February to June. It nests gregariously, forming nesting colonies in sand banks. The nest is a long tunnel into the sand bank, and the typical clutch consists of 5-6 spherical white eggs. Both parents participate in incubation duties.

Local name: The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater is known as '*lal-sir patringa*' in Hindi, '*kattalan kuruvi*' or '*panchankam*' in Tamil, and '*pithakanth patrango*' in Gujarati.

Brief note – Sighting of the Black-naped Oriole at Nehru Zoological Park

Photos: G Ramakrishna Rao

Mr G Ramakrishna Rao reported the sighting of the Black-naped Oriole at the Nehru Zoological Park on 12th February 2015. This is an extremely interesting record, as earlier reports of the species from Hyderabad have been few and far between.



Black-naped Oriole (Photos: G Ramakrishna Rao)

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 4 April 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 20th April 2015: Nehru Zoological Park. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Established in October 1959 and opened to the public in October 1963, the 380-acre Zoo, located adjacent to the Mir Alam Tank, offers its denizens a variety of habitats, including patches of forest, a water body, grassland, etc. Not surprisingly, the zoo has usually yielded a good selection of bird sightings. The various enclosures hold a lot of small ground and tree birds, as well as a number of water birds. Eurasian Thick-knees have been known to breed near the Sambhar enclosure. There have been several interesting sightings and observations in the past, and this trip should be no exception. There is also the added attraction of the Butterfly Park within the zoo.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Mr Nikil Rangadas on “Gorillas in the Mist”.

Tuesday, 7th April 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Nikil is a Life Member of our Society and is an avid traveler. His wanderlust has taken him to the heart of Africa where he encountered and studied the gorillas from up close. He will share his experiences with these fascinating animals which are now highly endangered.

ONE TOUCH OF NATURE MAKES THE WHOLE WORLD KIN

Report – Pulicat, 25-28 December, 2014

Text: Amritha Lawrence; Photos: Umesh Mani



Eurasian Spoonbill

So said William Shakespeare. Indeed, the touch of nature can make even the most iced heart thaw and dance with joy for the chance to stand amidst something so peaceful and soothing to your heart and soul. This is what my heart felt during my recent trip to Pulicat for the year-end Annual Waterfowl Census, with

my father Lawrence Mathappan, Humayun Taher and Mr. Ramakrishna Rao. As everyone else was in the rush of heading back home for the Christmas holiday, we were heading to the station to mark the beginning of what would turn into the best way of closing one's year.

It was around 4:30PM on 24th December when we reached Secunderabad station. The train that was supposed to arrive at 5:20PM came at about 5:45PM as per our Indian Standard Time, but left the station soon to try and make up for the lost time. We found our seats and, once we had settled in, the older crowd started sharing their prior experiences with this particular event.

By around 10:00PM, most of us called it a night, but with all the jitters and excitement we had, most of us woke up earlier than the estimated reaching time. Reaching Sulurupeta at around 3:30AM, we took an auto to the lodge, where we met up with our other group member, Umesh, and then retired to our rooms to grab a little sleep before our day actually started.

Day 1 - December 25, 2014 - Nelapattu

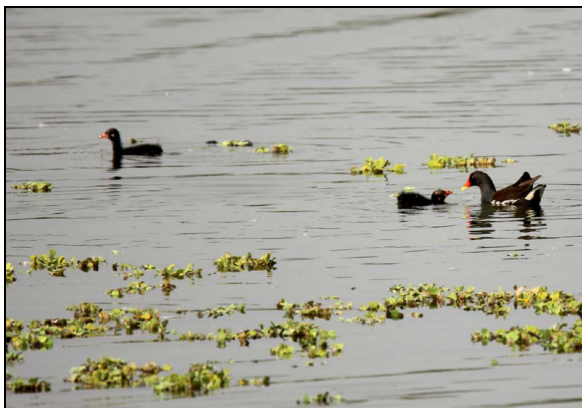


Common Hawk Cuckoo

Getting ready by 6:30AM for what would be a long but great day, we all met up in front of the lodge. After a good breakfast, and having packed ourselves some lunch, we set off on our way to Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary to start our Bird census. Sitting in the 'boot' of the seven-seater auto, I had an excellent view of both sides of the road, and saw an Asian Openbill and a Purple Heron in flight. Reaching the Sanctuary at about 9:00AM, we were greeted by a Common Hawk Cuckoo sitting on the fence beside the entry path, emitting its eerie call, and a few Ashy Woodswallows on the electric wires in the adjoining field. Entering the Sanctuary, we started walking towards the watch-tower.

and some Egrets before we came to the first clump of bushes, on which rested a bunch of Cormorants and a few of the stunning Eurasian Spoonbills in full breeding plumage. Meanwhile, we met up with Mr Ramakrishna Rao, who had come there directly. Walking along the trail, we stopped at our first viewing point to watch the first set of waterfowl, and it was like heaven on water to me - never in my wildest dreams had I ever thought that I would ever be so close to the birds I always saw only on TV!

As we moved further along the trail, what I at first thought to be a few Spot-billed Pelicans and Asian Openbills turned out to be a whole blanket of them covering most of the place. Having spent a little time there, we decided to take a look further down the trail in the hope of finding some other species, but we did not find anything extraordinary, barring a Pied Kingfisher and a few Blue-tailed Bee-eaters which entertained us for a while. Returning to the watch-tower, we set up our scope and started the count. It was fun when the 'tourists' strolling around also got interested in what we were doing and started looking at the birds through our binoculars and spotting scopes.



Common Moorhen with young



Spot-billed Pelican with chick in nest

The only disappointment was that the nesting seemed to have been delayed - we found only one Spot-billed Pelican chick that was hatched, the rest of the Pelicans seemed to be still building their nests or, in some cases, incubating. But it was good to see about 9-10 Asian Openbill nests with some few-days-old chicks.

In and beside the water on the left, we spotted a Common Moorhen with young ones in tow, a White-breasted Waterhen



Asian Openbill with chicks in nest

Another highlight for me was the sight of two Black-crowned Night Herons hiding in between the branches and peeping out at us. There were also a lot of Black-headed Ibises and Cormorants, some of them engaged in nest-building, and assorted Egrets.



Little Cormorant with nesting material



Black-headed Ibis

A Eurasian Marsh Harrier made a brief overpass.



Eurasian Marsh Harrier

Winding up the count by around 12:00PM, we parted ways with Mr. Ramakrishna Rao and set off to a nearby café to have some refreshments, where I spotted a Large-billed Crow chasing a Common Kestrel. After the short break, we went back to the grassland adjoining a lake, opposite the sanctuary, hoping that we may find some interesting birds there. We did find some Little Stints and Plovers but I was too tired and did not have the energy to accompany the others as they walked around the area. As I was sitting at the auto, I spotted a few Prinias, which flew before I could get a picture of them. On their return, the others reported having seen a Montagu's Harrier, besides various other waders.



Montagu's Harrier

Soon after, having returned to the lodge and freshened up, the others gathered to discuss and complete the list of birds seen during the day, while I, being quite exhausted, called it a day and went to sleep.

Day 2 - December 26, 2014 - Tada & Irakam Island

The day began with the arrival of another group member, Anand Kalinadhabhatla, who reached the lodge around 5:00AM. After the usual breakfast, and having collected our packed lunches, we set off for a day of birding at Tada & Irakam Island in Pulicat Lake. Near the jetty, we were welcomed by a beautiful Caspian Tern, some Scaly-breasted Munias, Jungle Babblers, and a couple of Blyth's Pipits.



Blyth's Pipit



Eurasian Curlew

We saw a Eurasian Curlew, which was like a flag-off to the great day that awaited us. Once the boat was ready, we set out for birding in and around the island. En route, we saw a few jellyfish in the water; this was the very first time I had come across them, so it gave me such a jittery feeling that I almost flipped the boat in order to see them. Behind the boat, I saw two Caspian Terns following our trail in the hope of finding something to eat. We also spotted a few flying fishes here and there.

After a fairly long boat ride, we arrived at Irakam Island. Initially we did not see many birds, but as we scanned the surrounding areas, we started seeing them, camouflaged as they were amongst the grass - Grey-headed Lapwings, Pacific Golden Plovers, Little and Great Cormorants, and lots of terns flying around.



Grey-headed Lapwing

After unsuccessfully trying to photograph some of the terns, we started walking into the island to see what treasures lay hidden there. It turned out to be a long walk in the heat of the day, but we were rewarded by sightings of a Pied Crested Cuckoo, some more Pacific Golden Plovers at close range, a few unidentified Snipes that shot off like bullets as we walked by, a distant Eurasian Curlew and a couple of Painted Storks.



Pied Crested Cuckoo

By now it was getting really hot, so we decided to begin the long walk back. En route, we saw various assorted larks and pipits, of which the Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark gave good views.



Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (male)

Once we had almost reached the jetty where our boat was berthed, we sat down on a bund to take a tea break and also discuss what we saw on the island. Umesh and I tried to get a good shot of the Little Tern, which was flying just a few feet away from us, but it kept taking sudden turns just as we would click the camera. Soon after, we set off again on the boat, planning to scout the lake en route to find other birds; once again, we were accompanied by our very old friend the Caspian Tern. Lunch on the boat turned out to be an interesting picnic, since we had no plates - which is when I realized my talent to really work with gravity on sea!



Caspian Tern

En route, we came across a few Greater Flamingos, Spot-billed Pelicans and Northern Pintails and, a little further, a flock of Gulls, which were predominantly Brown-headed - the first time I ever saw them in front of me - and a few Pallas'. They seemed

tolerant, so we could take a few good shots of them sitting in the water.



Pallas's Gull

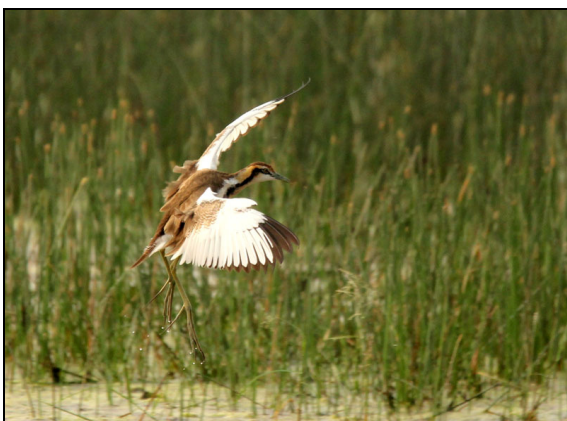
We now decided to head back to the mainland. On reaching shore, we spent a little time at the water body near the Forest Department office, where we found some Common Coots, Northern Shovelers, and our old friends the terns. Since it was already getting dark, we set off for our lodge, deciding to return here again the next day.

As usual, we freshened up in our rooms, by which time Mr. Ramakrishna also arrived at our lodge. We started listing out the birds we saw that day, ensuring that nothing was missed out, and soon after, went out for dinner. Walking back later, we decided that the day was not yet over - some coffee and ice cream was needed! A nearby general store supplied us with all that we wanted, after which we bid each other good night and retired for the day.

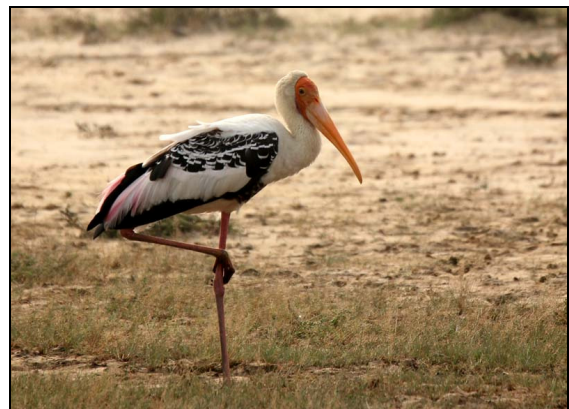
Day 3 - 27 December 2014 - SHAR Road

Today's plan was to scout the Sriharikota Road. By 6:30AM the crew was all ready, along with lunches packed, and raring to go. Reaching the location, we started the walk and the first burst of excitement hit us immediately - a Pallid Harrier! For some time, we watched the harrier lazily scanning a nearby field; unfortunately it was too far away to take decent photographs.

Moving on, we were treated to the sightings of several Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, adult and immature Little Ringed Plovers, Purple Swamphens, Common and Wood Sandpipers, a few Northern Shovelers, Asian Openbills and Painted Storks.



Pheasant-tailed Jacana



Painted Stork



Little Ringed Plover (adult)



Common Ringed Plover (adult)

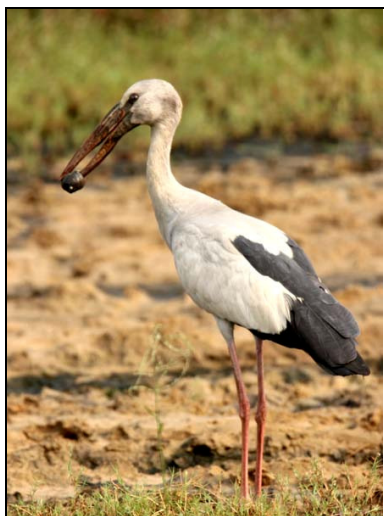


Little Ringed Plover (juvenile)



Common Ringed Plover (juvenile)

Several Barn Swallows perched on the wires, sunning themselves. A couple of Blyth's Pipits challenged us for a while, and an Asian Openbill showed us why its bill is designed the way it is.



Asian Openbill

After spending some good time with this Plover, we decided to move ahead. After a long walk, we came across a fairly large number of flamingos, but the only disappointment was that they were not in one single group, but rather, were scattered intermittently along either side of the road. We also saw good numbers of Kentish Plovers, Common Greenshanks, Ruff, Wood and Marsh Sandpipers, and Little Stints with, in their midst, a solitary Sand Plover.



Kentish Plover (adult)

Next came a bush which gave us the sighting of a handful of chattering Rosy Starlings, followed by a patch of mud-flats that was teeming with waders. And this is where we hit pay dirt - Humayun's sharp eyes located, in the midst of scores of waders, the Common Ringed Plover! Apparently this was a very infrequently seen bird, and with his patient explanations, we were all able to see and appreciate this prized sighting.

The temperature was getting chilly, and suddenly came a misty fog which made it difficult for us to take pictures and identify the birds. After waiting a while, we decided to proceed further on our way towards Sriharikota.

It was an eventful ride as we spotted big flocks of Little Stints flying around in perfect coordination with each other. We also saw a Common Kestrel with its kill, which was a sight to behold. Out in the distance, we saw a big flock of Godwits and a huge raft of what looked like Northern Pintails - it was as though a carpet had been spread on the water. Umesh later told us that it took him eighteen photographs to cover the entire lot from left to right!



Possible Northern Pintail flock



Common Kestrel with kill
(Photo: Humayun Taher)

On the other side, we were entertained for a time by a shining Pacific Golden Plover. There were also quite a few Brown-headed Gulls flying around. Further afield, there were a few Glossy Ibises sauntering around in the wet patches of grass.



Pacific Golden Plover



Brown-headed Gull

We then stopped for a leisurely lunch near the gates of SHAR station, where we rested for a while, watching a few crows at work extricating food from the garbage bags. Around 2:30PM, we decided to head to the lake near the Forest Department office, hoping to find some more interesting birds, since the previous day did show promise. Once there, we saw a lot of Whiskered and Little Terns, along with several Northern Shovelers and Common Coots. Winding up by 4:30PM, we headed back to the lodge for the evening routine of comparing our lists and observations.

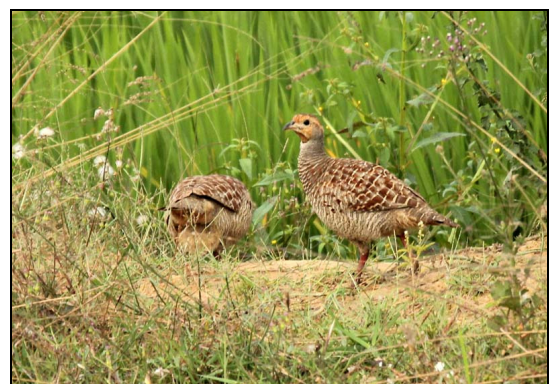
Day 4 - 28th December 2014 - Minjur

This was the last day of the trip, but since our train was scheduled to leave only at 7:00PM, we decided that we could go out birding till around lunch. So, as usual, we set off early, finished breakfast and headed to a couple of interestingly-named nearby lakes, Peddanna Chevuvu and Chinnanna Cheruvu, hoping to find something 'different'.

To our surprise, we did manage to find one Black Bittern and, to add a twist, a River Tern - which was a surprise because River Terns being fresh-water terns, aren't expected to be seen at Pulicat.



River, Whiskered and Little Terns



Grey Francolin



White-eyed Buzzard



Streaked Weaver

We also saw many of the regulars - Plain Prinia, Barn Swallows, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, Indian Rollers, Paddyfield Pipits, Black-

headed Munias, Grey Francolins, Green Bee-eaters, an Ashy Woodswallow, a distant White-eyed Buzzard, and the not-so-common Streaked Weaver and Pied Crested Cuckoo. Later on, we also saw a big flock of Spot-billed Pelicans and Greater Flamingos scattered around the lake.

By about 1:30PM, we headed back to the lodge, as it was again starting to get cloudy, and Umesh wanted to leave by around 4:00PM, as he was to drive back to Chennai; prior to that, we also had to discuss the day's list.

Bidding goodbye and a safe journey to Umesh, we too packed up to head back home. It was a little heart-breaking to leave the place that had given me such wonderful birding, but it was a great experience for a beginner like me, as I not only got to experience birding with senior birders, but also up saw huge numbers of very beautiful birds up close, something not many birders get to experience initially.



White-breasted Waterhen with young

Report - BSAP AWC Participants Certificate Presentation function

Text: Humayun Taher; Photos: Amritha Lawrence

The annual Asian Midwinter Waterfowl Count (AWC) is a regular feature of the BSAP calendar and are well-attended by the members. AP (and now AP+Telangana) has been a regular contributor to this important international initiative since the inception of the program in 1987. This year (2015) also, the response from the members was very heartening and over 35 members participated in the counts throughout the two states.

To encourage and recognise the participants' efforts is something that has been on our minds for some time. To this end, this year we decided to ask the Wetlands International Secretariat if we could use their name and logo on a certificate to be presented to the participants. Wetlands International gave us a very positive

response and encouraged us in this initiative. Accordingly, it was decided to have a small, informal function where we would invite the participants and present them with the certificates, to acknowledge their contributions towards the AWC activities.

Hence, on Saturday 11th April 2015, a small tea-time function was organized at the Vidyaranya School in Saifabad. The invitation list was restricted to the members of the BSAP who had participated in the Waterfowl Count activities and the BSAP Executive Committee. The program was kept "under wraps" as much as possible, so very few of the members had any idea of what was actually in the air!

Opening the function, BSAP President Aasheesh Pittie addressed the members about the importance of the Waterfowl Count activities, what the ramifications of this exercise are and how it is a key tool in understanding global populations of waterbirds and in gauging distribution patterns and population trends. He also stressed the importance of recording all our observations in the appropriate forums to ensure that these records are preserved for posterity and are readily available later on as required. His address was encouraging and very enthusiastically received. I think many of our members at that point wanted to ensure that the recording of the species is done with the minimum of delay!



Aasheesh Pittie addressing the gathering

BSAP Hon. Secretary and AWC State Co-ordinator Shafaat Ulla spoke about the actual AWC activities and mentioned some of the highlights of this year's counts. He stressed the importance of revisiting even "disappointing" sites and added that it helps to plan sufficiently in advance, so as to ensure that maximum coverage is given to the established sites before moving on to additional sites. I think this is of supreme importance - although it is good to add on more sites and so increase the coverage of the counts, it is equally important to ensure that the earlier sites are regularly monitored. Additional sites are good, but not at the cost of passing over or being cursory with the existing sites. Another point mentioned by Shafaat Ulla was that even a "zero-count" is as important as a "high-count".

BSAP member Humayun then presented some actual facts and figures. The AWC counts this year encompassed a total of 62 sites (39 in 2014); these sites yielded a total of 3,63,279 individual birds counted, comprising 112 species. Humayun also

read out some of the excellent and positive accolades and comments we have received from Wetlands International and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) on our efforts. This was received with great enthusiasm and applause from the members, and indeed it is something to be proud of! The fact that the AP+Telangana model is becoming a benchmark for AWC count data collation, is really a wonderful achievement for the BSAP and it is all thanks to the members who participated so enthusiastically in the count exercise.



A section of the audience

Following on from this, it was time for the actual business of the evening, which was the presentation of the AWC certificates to the participants. More than 50% of the members present were unaware of this new initiative, and were pleasantly surprised to be awarded these certificates. Aasheesh Pittie, Shafaat Ulla, M S Kulkarni, Nandu Kumar and Surekha Aitabathula presented the certificates to the participants who were present. (Here it may be pertinent to mention that the AWC count participants who could not attend the function are requested to contact Humayun to get their certificates.)

Members were also delighted to receive a personal note of congratulations from Wetlands International on these certificates, as it is an initiative that has often been mooted but never put into action. BSAP can justifiably claim another first here, as being the first organisation to actually present these participation certificates to the AWC participant members.

Tea and snacks, of course, are a foregone conclusion where BSAP activities are concerned and we indulged heartily in some tasty samosas, biscuits and that never-failing-cure-for-all-ills, hot, sweet *chai*.

The function ended with a vote of thanks proposed by Surekha Aitabathula.

BIRDS AND NEWBIES
Trip Report – Pocharam, 15th March 2015
Humayun Taher



Glossy Ibis (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

There were quite a few of both, on this most excellent day! And I venture to suggest that all had a good time by the end of the day. Birds are always a joy to be around and, when you have several newcomers also turning out, joy becomes unconfined.

Shafaatsaab had some work on the day, so he had asked me to go ahead and lead. I hate leading the way - I invariably get lost when asked to lead the way - but excuses couldn't be made and so I reluctantly agreed. That being the case, it was a bit of a relief to find that the route to Pocharam is well-known and I wouldn't have to actually find my way to the site. Lawrence met me at Punjagutta and we waited for a few more people to join us. What we didn't bargain for was a busload of PhD students arriving and announcing that they were also accompanying the group. Well, everyone has as much of a right to enjoy a day out as us and I am not complaining. If we can encourage some of the students, it will be a definite step in the right direction.

A couple more cars now arrived and, having organized the people, we started off for the Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary where, according to Shafaatsaab, the staff had been informed of our arrival and were waiting to welcome us with open arms (and, no doubt, with open gates as well). We decided that we would not halt at Narsapur as we sometimes do, since Pocharam is a considerable distance and we wanted to reach there as early as possible.

That said, one stop that cannot, and should not, be avoided is the mandatory pit-stop for the *chai* that is an inseparable adjunct of birding. The *chai* shop at the gates of the Air Force Academy did us well in the matter of the steaming bohea, and coffee for the more purist of our members. Several other members had arrived at this rendezvous point, and the convoy of cars increased exponentially when we all finished our refreshments and started off again. Halting at Medak to stock up on edibles, we finally reached the Pocharam sanctuary at around 9 in the morning, which is quite late for birding.

Instead of entering the sanctuary, we decided to first head out to the lake, and investigate the sanctuary on our return. So said all

of us and what a good decision it turned out to be! We trundled along the dirt road and finally pulled up at the little depression of rocks at the end that overlooks the waters.



Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Shouldering the usual accoutrements of birding, we stood there, taking in the sights. There was a considerable raft of duck on the waters; a very large raft was dimly visible in the distance, but quite a few of the birds were closer to the shores where we stood. We mounted the scopes onto the tripods and set off along the smooth edge of the lake, the short grass, well-cropped by geese and ducks resembling a well-manicured lawn, the swollen lake (really, this seems to be the only water-body around that actually has some water in it) and the dense scrub jungle stretching away on the eastern side which is the main Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary.



Garganey (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

It was a sight for sore eyes, all right! And the birds too... what can I say of the riot of colours and plumages that were discernible through the keen eyes of the two spotting scopes. Wigeons, resplendent in their red heads with fawn-coloured 'tilak' marks on the forehead; Garganeys, diminutive-looking creatures with thick white eye-brows permanently raised, giving them a very supercilious expression; Spot-billed Ducks, neat and dainty with the dual-coloured beaks... but the best of the lot were the Black-tailed Godwits, some of them coming into their nuptial colours. These gorgeous birds, when fully dressed for breeding are magnificent creatures and we were very happy to see that several of the 300-odd birds we saw were in breeding regalia. Our lensmen were delighted with this display and captured some wonderful photographs of these magnificently-plumaged birds.



Black-tailed Godwit (Photo: Gunbir Singh)



Lesser Whistling-duck (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

The students arrived in their bus by this time and clustered around the scopes. Their keen eyes were able to discern a small pod of Greater Flamingos on the far bank. We peered through the scopes and twisted the magnification up to the maximum. Yes... sure enough, there they were... a group of some ten of the long-legged, long-necked birds sweeping the shallows for their preferred victuals. The water, though considerable, did not appear to be deep at the ends and where the flamingos were

feeding, it was no more than about shin-deep. There were several hundred ducks scattered about on these shallows, but distance defeated a positive identification.



Cotton Pygmy-geese (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)



Brahminy Kite (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

A Brahminy Kite appeared overhead, gracefully skimming through the air, its bright yellow eyes scouring the waters for fish or frogs or maybe even an injured or young bird. On two small rocky islands in the bowels of the lake sat a vast flock of Great Cormorants, looking for all the world like a gaggle of nuns, awaiting the arrival of the new Pope! The heat from the sun bouncing off the waters was making the cormorants flutter their necks frantically and I wondered, as I mopped my own face with an already-sodden handkerchief, why they didn't take to the waters to cool themselves down.



Small Pratincole (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

The newer members were now observed bombarding the “oldies” with questions and comments. Books came into action and some pertinent and interesting questions were being asked and responded to. I took this opportunity to give some of the newcomers a spot-lesson on bird identification which, I am pleased to report, was well-received and, in fact, immediately implemented - one of our new members proudly announced that she had managed to identify a Garganey; an excellent start to birding!



Wire-tailed Swallow (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

While talking we observed three people suddenly appear from the wildlife sanctuary and out onto the shores of the lake. Separated as we were by the sheet of water, we were not sure whether these were BSAP members or not, but a glance through the scopes and binoculars revealed that they were all long-standing members of the society. Nandu, Hargopal and Ramakrishna *garus* had duped us all... they had reached this place the previous evening! Speaking to them on the mobile, we decided to meet up for victuals at the Forest Department office at the entrance of the sanctuary.

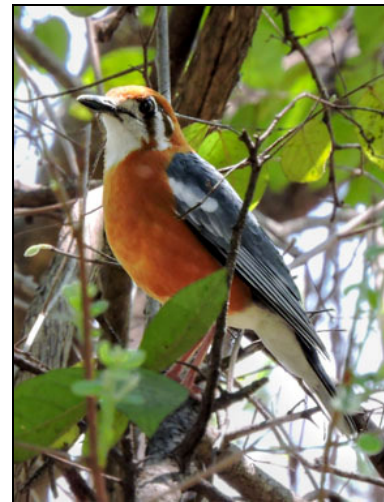
In the meantime, the students decided that they had seen most of what they wanted to see and, with many thanks and assurances of returning, they departed in their charabanc. The rest of us, having also seen most of what was to be seen on the waters, now turned our attention to the larks and pipits running about on the shores. There were several interesting species to be seen, such as the Sykes’s Lark and the Paddyfield Pipit.



Tickell’s Blue Flycatcher (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

I looked in vain for the Grey-necked Bunting that is quite regularly seen on the shores of Pocharam, but there were none this time. Nor did we see the Sandgrouse that, again, are regulars at this spot. Maybe it was a trifle late in the day now for these birds; a fact that was borne out by the strength of the sun on our backs.

It was time to return, so we packed up our optics and headed back to the Forest Department office, where there are good shady trees under which we could sit and partake of our breakfast. While fuelling ourselves, a Paradise Flycatcher appeared on the tree above our heads, much to our delight. It sat there, peering down in puzzlement at the motley collection.



Orange-headed Thrush (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

An Orange-headed Thrush was also sighted just outside the fence, which had all the photographers clustering around and almost treading on each other’s toes in their eagerness to get that perfect shot. Meantime we wrote up the list for the day, and were pleased to note that the total stood at the considerable figure of 89 species. What more could one ask or expect from our most excellent and benevolent St. Patrick!!

The full list of species seen is given below:

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
1	R	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	
2	R	Large Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	
3	R	Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	NT
4	R	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	
5	R	Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	
6	R	Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>	
7	R	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	
8	R	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	
9	R	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>	
10	R	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	
11	R	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	NT
12	R	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	
13	R	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	NT
14	R	Indian Black Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>	
15	V	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	
16	R	Lesser Whistling-duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	
17	R	Comb Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>	
18	R	Cotton Pygmy-goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>	
19	M	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	
20	R	Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>	
21	M	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	
22	R	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	
23	R	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	
24	R	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	
25	R	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	
26	R	Indian Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	
27	R	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	
28	R	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	
29	R	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	
30	R	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	
31	M	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	
32	R	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	
33	M	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	NT
34	M	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	
35	M	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	
36	M	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	
37	R	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	
38	R	Small Pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>	
39	R	River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	
40	R	Black-bellied Tern	<i>Sterna acuticauda</i>	NT
41	M	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
42	R	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia intermedia</i>	
43	R	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	
44	R	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	
45	R	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicopterus</i>	
46	R	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	
47	R	Southern Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	
48	R	Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>	
49	R	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	
50	R	Asian Palm-swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>	
51	R	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	
52	R	White-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	
53	R	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	
54	R	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	
55	R	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	
56	R	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus birostris</i>	
57	R	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	
58	R	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>	
59	R	Sykes's Lark	<i>Galerida deva</i>	
60	M	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
61	R	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	
62	R	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	
63	R	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>	
64	R	Large Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>	
65	R	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	
66	R	Asian Paradise-flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	
67	R	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	
68	R	White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>	
69	R	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	
70	R	Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>	
71	R	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>	
72	M	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	
73	R	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	
74	R	Indian Black Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus fulicatus</i>	
75	R	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	
76	R	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	
77	R	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>	
78	M	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	
79	R	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>	
80	R	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>	
81	R	Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>	
82	R	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
83	R	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	
84	M	Rosy Starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>	
85	R	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	
86	R	Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>	
87	R	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	
88	R	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	
89	R	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	



Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

Sighting of Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo at Hyderabad

Anand Kalinadhabhatla, Eva Veroeveren and Sheetal Vyas report the sighting of a Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo at University of Hyderabad campus on the 6th of July, 2014.



Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo
(Photo: Eva Veroeveren)

The art of birding along roads

Anjali Pande

As we usually see them, roads are means to an end. They let us find our destinations. We hardly ever think about roads as birding areas or as destinations for bird watching. Over the years, however, I have seen that roads hold many a secret birding delight, which we miss when we only speed along them. The commonest acknowledgement of this importance of roads on birding trips comes in the form of our additions to birding lists under the sub-title “birds seen en route” and as we habitually start looking out for birds perched on electric lines along the roads.

A fruitful birding experience is provided by roads which run along the borders of wooded areas, or which mark a division between protected areas and villages. Walking down these roads, one can hope to run into interesting mixed hunting parties, which remain longer in the open compared to sightings in wooded areas. Just by being on the right side of such a road at the right time, one can get to watch even small and shy or normally elusive birds without much difficulty.

This works especially well when the road also demarcates altitudes. Mornings on such roads yield sightings of birds as they leave thickly-wooded areas to forage in the surrounding fields or along water streams etc. Around noon, these roads are the places where one can hope to see raptors heading out to look for prey in open countryside. And as evening falls, these roads can provide unexpected encounters with Nightjars or even with four-legged dwellers of woods.

Unarguably the best form of birding while walking down a road can be experienced on tiny, winding village paths. Walking down leisurely along such paths guarantees hours of joy and, invariably, a very satisfying mix of bird habitat. We can have our own favourite corner on such small paths, to mark those surprise sightings of rarities. On a tiny path somewhere around Ooty, I was once pleasantly surprised by the laughter of some Nilgiri Laughing Thrushes foraging under some bushes.

On days when the heat is too strong or activity is low, a walk along village paths can be a very good alternative to birding in woods. However, sometimes walking around on deserted village paths can put you in an unexpected tough spot, as we once experienced when a village dog decided to follow and finally bite one of us. We ended up looking for the village Health Centre instead of getting back to catch the return bus!

As one goes along village paths looking for birds, sometimes friendly villagers volunteer useful information leading to very good sightings of nests or roosting areas. Just as useful as the tiny village paths are busy roads crossing through peripheries of protected forest areas. Although one does need to be extremely cautious while walking along such roads that have heavy traffic on them, these state highways can be walked along stretches where they skirt forests. In spite of disturbances like loud honking of trucks or having to constantly keep an eye on traffic, one can have good sightings as such roads are lined with tall trees which are preferred perches for some birds.

The most interesting, of course, are roads that are, on their own, pleasant birding destinations for an easy day’s birding. If you are lucky enough to live in areas that have hills or forests easily accessible, one strategy is to get on a bus, get down at some place on this road and walk either onwards or back to point A - for example, take a bus to Mukkali, get down somewhere en route and walk down to the entrance to Silent Valley, to be greeted by the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithacus*) and those roosting Ashy Woodswallows (*Artamus fuscus*) every time. In Shillong, the Old Guwahati Road is one such good birding destination; closer home many of us have birded along roads to Ananthagiri or Narsapur.

A word of caution though, while birding along roads look out for vehicles, especially while crossing the road. While watching or tracking a bird, we tend to get ‘lost’ and not pay attention to where we are walking - we need to just be careful because, after all, roads are built for traffic first.

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 01-04-2014)

Sighting of Striated Heron at Hyderabad

Text and photo: Sudhir Moorti



Striated Heron

On the 4th of April, 2015, Anita & I as usual decided to head to Himayat Sagar Lake for a spot of birding in an attempt to escape from the corporate grind. Starting off post-lunch, we reached the spot around 3:00PM. As we were approaching the shore, negotiating the bumpy dirt-track, we were greeted by a lethargic cormorant sitting fairly close by and sunning itself. After watching and catching the little guy on camera, we moved on.

We parked the car and decided to walk along the shore to our left. We reached a small island (If you can call it that) covered with some three to four hundred raucously loud River Terns. We sat for a while on the bank and enjoyed their naughty antics.

As we followed a narrow trail, we met some of our passerine friends - Paddyfield Warblers, Red-vented Bulbuls, Common Ioras and Indian Robins to name a few. In the water were some Garganeys, swimming around lazily, while a Common Kingfisher sat on a reed and some Painted Storks circled above.

Having hit the end of the trail we turned back. Light had started fading, so we thought of calling it a day. We were delighted to

spot a Greater Painted-snipe sitting at the edge of water. Though we couldn't get any good pictures, we were content to have seen it.

As I was walking ahead, suddenly there was some rustling and a bird flew from nearby, across a strip of water and landed on the other bank. I shot off a couple of snaps in flight and realised that it was not a Pond Heron. We ran, trying to get as close possible to the bird, and got a couple of more pictures of it sitting on the bank before it skedaddled into a cluster of reeds.

Closer examination revealed that it was indeed the Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*). The bird being crepuscular in Nature had wandered out of thick reeds since it was dusk. We high-fived and congratulated ourselves on such good luck. Our day was certainly made!!!

We were told there were very few records from this region but that it is probably because of its crepuscular habits that it is seldom sighted.

Sighting of Great Thick-knee at Hyderabad

Text and photo: Sudhir Moorti

Anita and I, being the Obsessive Compulsive Birders (like the disorder) that we are, keep sneaking off to nearby birding areas (important or not) even on weekdays. These pockets of relief from our demanding corporate lives are huge stress-busters. So on 9th March, 2015 we drove away towards Ameenpur. We rushed to the lake directly from office (in proper formal attire) in search of the elusive Dunlin after hearing of some sightings at this spot. I tried to take a shortcut and promptly lost my way; as usual Google Maps led me astray. Finally we reached the lake, parked the car and set off in search of the evading wader.

As we walked along the shore, we found ourselves staring intensely at all each and every shorebirds, but only the usual Sandpipers, Stints and Plovers were hanging around. Hardly a few minutes into our quest, we were trudging along when a bird suddenly took off from close by, which at first glance appeared to be a Thick-knee. But we had a sneaking suspicion as it looked much larger, hence we decided to investigate, abandoning our

efforts to spot the Dunlin - luckily for us! About a hundred meters further down the shore, we saw the fellow standing on the green grass. On getting closer, we realised that it was actually a Great Thick-knee (*Esacus recurvirostris*) - the striking black-and-white pattern on the face and the slightly recurved bill was enough confirmation for us. Our joy knew no bounds, but we stifled our excitement and followed the bird, which had flown further ahead. We tiptoed as close as possible and gazed to our heart's content; I also got a few shots, until the bird ended the show by simply flying across the lake towards the far shore.

We let out a few whoops and carried on birding for an hour or so more. Many of my non-birder friends often ask me what I get out of it (birding), some of them even think I am completely Cuckoo (pun intended)! I guess it's those few seconds of glee upon sighting a beautiful bird, which is the only real reward for our efforts.



Great Thick-knee

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*)



Purple Sunbird

(Ankola, Karnataka, 15-01-2012)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Nectariniidae
Genus: *Cinnyris*
Species: *C. asiaticus*
Size: 10 cm

Description & distribution: The Purple Sunbird is a small sunbird with distinct sexual dimorphism. It has a relatively short down-curved bill, with brush-tipped tubular tongues that help in sucking out flower nectar, their main food. The male Purple Sunbird is a dark, glossy, metallic purple on its upperparts, with wings that appear dark brown; the underparts are also the same blackish-purple in the breeding season. The iridescent purple colour becomes visible when the light strikes it at the right angle. In the non-breeding (or 'eclipse') males, though, the underparts are yellow with a central streak of black. In breeding plumage, the male bird also has a bright-blue shoulder patch, yellow pectoral tufts, and a maroon tinge to the collar feathers. Female birds are olive-green above and yellowish below, with the yellow throat and breast becoming paler towards the vent. They have a dark eye-stripe and a pale supercilium extending behind the eye. White-tipped outer tail feathers are seen in both sexes.

The Purple Sunbird has a wide distribution, from West Asia across the Indian sub-continent to South-east Asia. The nominate race is found mainly in India, east of the desert regions of Rajasthan and south of the Himalayas, all through west and south India into Sri Lanka. The region from northern Andhra Pradesh, northwards through Orissa to Bangladesh, Myanmar and Indochina see the sub-species *C. a. intermedius*, whereas *C. a. brevirostris* is seen from the desert regions of Rajasthan and Gujarat, westwards across Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Arabian peninsula. This sub-species has been known to winter south near Goa, and has a greenish tinge to the yellow pectoral tufts.

Behaviour: The Purple Sunbird is resident in most parts of its range, though with some local movements noted in the drier parts of Pakistan and north-western India. It is usually found in pairs or, sometimes, in small groups. It prefers thin forest patches and gardens, including urban spaces, which have suitable flowers from where it can source nectar, its primary diet; it does also take fruit, berries and small insects occasionally, though. It prefers to perch rather than hover while taking nectar, and has a tendency to flick its wings while feeding. While it usually uses its tubular tongue to suck out nectar, it is also known to slit flowers at the base for this purpose.

The Purple Sunbird is very vocal, and has a piercing 'chwit' or 'chwing' call. It may join other individuals to mob owls or other predators. The courtship display involves the male raising its head, fanning the tail, fluttering the partly-open wings to expose the yellow pectoral tufts, and singing.

Nesting: The Purple Sunbird breeds mainly before the monsoons, from April to June in India, and from January to June in Sri Lanka. The nest, built almost completely by the female, is a pouch of strips of vegetation, lichen and bark, which are not woven but are held together by cobwebs. It has an entrance hole on the side, which is usually shielded by an overhanging projection. The nest is usually suspended from low branches of thorny plants, but are quite often seen near human habitation, hanging from man-made structures like wires, light-bulbs, etc. The typical clutch consists of 2 eggs. Both parents participate in feeding duties, though the female may take on more trips as the chicks grow older.

Local name: The Purple Sunbird is known as 'shakar khora' or 'phool sungni' in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, 'thena pitta' or 'ooda thena pitta' in Telugu, and 'then-kudi' or 'poo-kudichan' in Tamil.

Reed-beds of the University of Hyderabad

Text and photos: Joby Joseph

There are two prominent water bodies and numerous waterlogged areas in the University of Hyderabad (UoH) campus. A large part of the area along the banks of these water bodies are reed-beds. They have been a source of a lot of birding joy for me over the past four years. Unlike the other types of vegetation that I bird in, these reed-beds are a challenge, but the rewards are proportionately exciting. As these are a stroll away from my work place, I tend to frequent them.

A variety of birds - crakes, reed warblers, prinias, weaver birds, bitterns and waders - inhabit reed-beds. However, the birds that

occupy reed-beds are most secretive as compared to those that inhabit the other vegetation around us. They are very shy and rarely come out of the thick reeds. If they do, they dart back immediately at the slightest sign of human presence. Patience and stillness are the key requirements.

I find it quite helpful to stand close to the reeds where you have a view of considerable stretch of the boundary of the reed-bed and a plain patch of land. This helps in seeing those that dart out of the reeds to the shore briefly, and at the same time enable one to peer into the reed-bed next to you.



Some birds found in the reed-beds in UoH: (A) Baillon's Crake (B) Ruddy-breasted Crake (C) Paddyfield Warbler (D) Greater Painted-snipe (E) Siberian Rubythroat (F) White-breasted Waterhen

Pictures of a few of the birds that I have sighted over the years are shown above. Some of them like the Siberian Rubythroat (*Luscinia calliope*) and Paddyfield Warbler (*Acrocephalus agricola*) are migrants and have been sighted in multiple seasons among these reeds. Some others like Ruddy-breasted Crake (*Porzana fusca*) are residents but seldom sighted. Others like White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Cinnamon Bittern (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*), Greater Painted-snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) and Purple Swamphens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) are seen more often.

When I look at the distribution maps for some of these species, I find some are hardly recorded from around Hyderabad. I think these species are more widespread than what is represented by the maps in field guides. It is possible that they are difficult to be sighted in places where they inhabit thick reeds and, hence, go unreported. An intensive survey of the reed-beds in and around our places of residence or work may be a good idea to test if this is the case. Arm yourselves with patience and stillness to enjoy the surprises!

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)

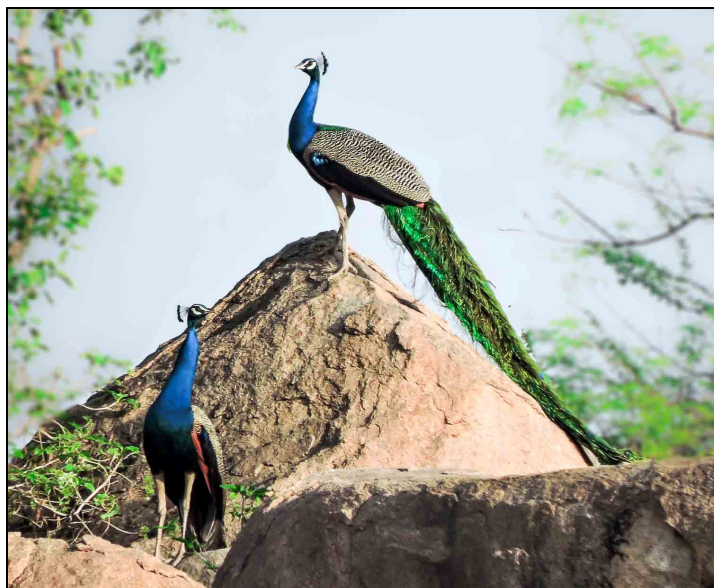
FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 17th May 2015: Qutubshahi Tombs. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

A popular tourist destination, the Qutubshahi Tombs also have a good amount of forest and shrub cover, and can be expected to yield a good selection of bird sightings.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

Trip Report – Nehru Zoological Park, 20 April, 2015

Sagarika Melkote



Indian Peafowl (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

A bird-watching trip to the Nehru Zoological Park would have sounded pretty incongruous to most of us, but when we were told that we were not going to be looking at the caged variety, our curiosity was piqued.

The Curator of the Zoo, Mr. Ramakrishna Rao, had made arrangements for the BSAP members to visit the Zoo on a Monday, which is, officially, the weekly holiday for the Zoo. The Zoo, with its vast expanse of greenery, water bodies and varied habitat, is home to many a species and he was sure we would find worth our while.

The trip to the Zoo, originally scheduled for April 13, had to be called off on account of heavy rain. Consequently, Mr. Ramakrishna graciously extended the invite for the following week. Being the die-hard birdwatchers that we are, many of us took the first half of the day off, notwithstanding the fact that it was Monday, the beginning of the working week! This was

evidenced by the fact that there was a record turnout of almost 25 members, including several newbies.

Once at the Zoo, we were met and welcomed by Mr. Ramakrishna, who had very kindly arranged for the Zoo's battery-operated vehicles to take our teams around unexplored areas of the Zoo, many of which are out of bounds for the general public. We were even going to do a round of the Lion Safari area - the big cats, we were assured, were locked up in enclosures on Mondays. He also assigned a Zoo staffer to each vehicle to act as guide.

With great expectations, and near-perfect weather, the teams set off in different directions, in the 'green' vehicles. Our first stop was near the 'reptile house', a vast open space fringed by tall trees in abundant numbers. What the place might have lacked in variety, it made up for in terms of sheer numbers.



Rose-ringed Parakeet (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

Uncountable Common Mynas, Crows, Rose-ringed Parakeets, Red-vented Bulbuls, Coppersmith Barbets and Yellow-billed Babblers flew around in reckless abandon. The highlight was the spotting of the nests of the Rose-ringed Parakeet and the Common Myna in the trees, both housing inquisitive chicks popping their heads out for a peek every now and then! Another look upwards and we saw the beautiful Golden Orioles, whose sex ratio was either completely skewed or the male of this species was maintaining a proper harem - there was one male amidst every 5-6 females!



Black Kite (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

Indian Peafowl roamed free, as if without a care in the world, and Black Kites screeched and swooped down now and then.



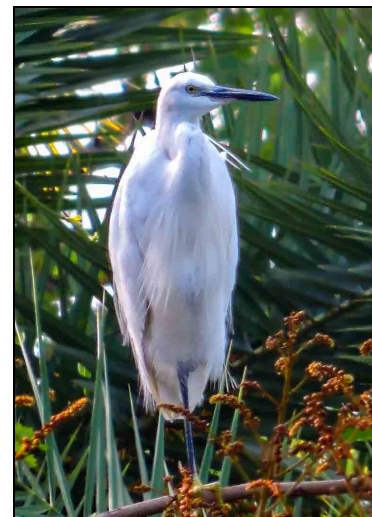
Black-crowned Night Heron (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

Black-crowned Night Herons in the crocodile enclosures made a striking sight, especially as they stood absolutely still on the water's edge, pretty much like the crocodiles themselves. The wait paid off for one heron as he managed to snag a really big fish. For a while, it seemed to us observers that he'd really bitten off more than he could chew, as he struggled to ingest the fish. After a while, he emerged victorious - we could almost hear him burp!



Painted Stork (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

Further ahead, en route to Spot no. 2, several Painted Storks, assorted Egrets and more Night Herons came to alight at a spot which the zoo authorities call the 'Bird School'.



Little Egret (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

A solitary Rufous Treepie offered us a brief glimpse before flying off to attend to more important things.



Rufous Treepie (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

Spot no. 2 turned out to be a water body. It didn't disappoint, as scores of Cormorants, Grey Herons and Little Grebes made their appearance. A whole flock of Lesser Whistling-ducks basked in the sun on a rock, and a Purple Swamphen strolled nonchalantly across the road.



Lesser Whistling-duck (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

On the opposite side, a smaller water body yielded Black-winged Stilts, Spot-billed Ducks, Kingfishers of three varieties and a lone Black-headed Ibis. Cinnamon and Yellow Bitterns made their appearance, striking a chord in all of us.

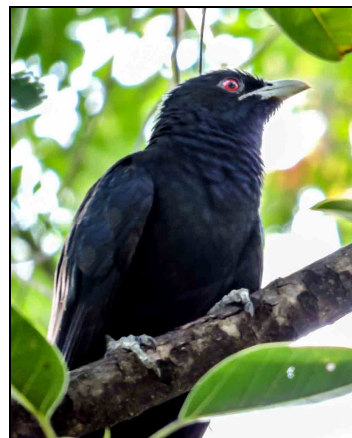


Oriental Magpie Robin (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

Shortly thereafter, a delicious breakfast appeared as if by magic, courtesy the Curator's office, and we all tucked in hungrily before venturing further.

The much awaited foray into the Lion Safari was preceded by nervous enquiry from most of us about whether all the big cats were safely locked up. On assurance that each and every one of them was accounted for, we entered the Safari area. The privilege

of roaming around the Safari area in an open vehicle is something that few can dream of.



Asian Koel (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

Inside the Safari area, thick with dry scrub forest, Green Bee-eaters flew round and round. Cupid seemed to be working his spell here, as we saw couples of the Asian Koel and the Indian Robin spending quality time together. A rustle of dry leaves underfoot, and out slithered a longish Rat Snake. The proverbial serpent in the Garden of Eden perhaps? Not quite, as he seemed to be happy minding his business, as did the couples in the trees above. We left them to it and made our way out.

There is a certain spot in the Zoo, which is said to be the haunt of the Spotted Owlet; unfortunately, we didn't spot any there. On our last leg, on the way out from the Safari, we were remarking to one another about how we missed seeing the Spotted Owlets when, as if on cue, one look upwards yielded handsome reward - the sight of a Spotted Owlet chick, staring out of a hole in the tree.



Spotted Owlet chick (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

We yelled for the driver to stop, and as a cascading effect all the vehicles behind screeched to a halt. Not only was there a chick in the nest, there were a couple of adults flitting about, and they even obliged by posing for the photographers in the group!



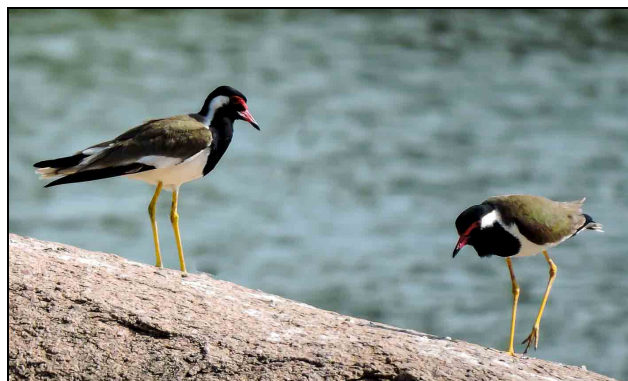
Spotted Owlet (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

A walk on the bund abutting the Mir Alam Tank, courtesy special permission of the Curator, marked the end of our trip. The icing on the cake, so to say, was the spotting of some Baya Weavers, and their nests, alongside the bund.

As the sun rose higher in the sky, it was a weary but extremely satisfied group of birders that gathered at the exit gate of the Zoo.

As a birder, one would not want to make a distinction between 'Common' and 'Rare' birds - while the Zoo trip may not have produced any lifers, the frequency of sightings and the abundance of numbers did it for us, not to speak of the privilege of venturing into the areas that are normally out of bounds for the general public.

We would, therefore, like to thank Mr. Ramakrishna Rao for his support in organizing this memorable trip, and look forward to going back again soon.



Red-wattled Lapwing (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

Report – KBR National Park, 29th April 2015

Text: Shafaat Ulla, Photos: Gunbir Singh



Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park (KBR Park), situated in the heart of Hyderabad in the Banjara Hills area, is spread over an area of 143 Hectares with vegetation that includes trees and thorn brush that is typical of the Deccan plateau. KBR Park is under the control of the Telangana Forest Department and is well protected and maintained. Walkers are allowed to walk on dedicated paths in a small part of the park; the rest of the Park

(about 90%) is a conservation zone, where the public is not allowed to enter.

The DFO, Mr. Mohan, had initiated a survey of the flora and fauna of the Park and had requested BSAP members to volunteer for the job and assist the Forest Department officials. Although it was a working day, about 18 of us turned up promptly at 6.30AM.

For the survey, the park had been divided into ten routes, with a forest official allocated to each. We also, therefore, divided ourselves into ten groups of ones and twos, and joined the officials of the various routes. Sagarika, Nandu and I joined Route No.5.

The Forest Department officials had been given specially-designed Data Sheets to be filled up during the survey. We dispersed to our designated starting points, and all the groups started walking simultaneously at 7.00AM, to avoid duplication of counting. It turned out to be a very enjoyable activity, as we were in the conservation zone which we had never seen before.



White-browed Bulbul

By about 8.30AM, we were done with the survey, and one by one the groups trooped back in to the Education Centre, and

submitted the Data Sheets which the department would collate later.

The highlight of the survey was the sighting of an Indian Pitta by Ajit Kumar and Samuel. This may well be the first record of the Indian Pitta being reported from KBR Park. A few other species of birds that were sighted were Spotted Owlet, Golden Oriole, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, White-browed Bulbul, Grey Francolin, etc., to name a few.

Hot breakfast and tea was waiting for us, which we needed badly! Therefore, after a quick group-photo session, we did full justice to the breakfast and, having thanked the DFO profusely for his hospitality, dispersed by about 10.00AM.

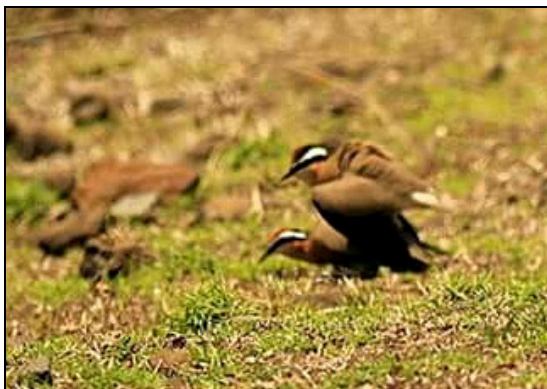


Common Iora

Variations in the breeding season of the Indian Courser (part-II)

Humayun Taher, Bindu Madhavi Racherla, Sharada Annamaraju,
M Lawrence, Amritha Lawrence

In our earlier article entitled "Variations in the Breeding Season of the Indian Courser" (Taher *et. al.* 2015), published in the March 2015 issue of the PITTA, we had requested BSAP members to contribute any additional information pertaining to breeding or nesting records of this interesting species of ground bird.



Indian Coursers mating
(Photo courtesy: Santosh Attreya)

As a result of this request, on 21st April 2015, one of us (HT) received a note and photograph from Amritha Lawrence (pers. comm. vide message dated 21-4-2015) showing a pair of Indian Coursers in mating posture. This photograph was taken on 19th April 2015 at a spot some 50+ km. away from Hyderabad city.

If we compare these dates with our observations in January (2014 and 2015), and with the breeding season mentioned in published literature, it seems likely that the breeding season of the Indian Courser is more long-drawn than was previously known. Chicks have been recorded as early as the month of January and now, towards the end of April, mating has been observed. Exact gestation period statistics are not known, but generally there would be an interval of 10 to 14 days between mating and egg-laying. Even if we discount that, the mating taking place in April substantiates the breeding season mentioned in the Handbook of the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent (Ali & Ripley, 1987) which is "...chiefly March to August. Some seasonal variation."



Indian Courser juvenile
(Photo: Humayun Taher)

Taking the recent observations into account, it therefore seems quite likely that the actual breeding season of the Indian Courser extends from January through to August. It is also possible that under favourable conditions, the birds may raise more than one brood. Besides, HT has recorded young birds (juveniles) in the

month of September (13th September 2014); these young birds were fully fledged and seemed to have been hatched around the months of July or August.

It is interesting, and indeed very instructive, to note how even casual observations can add important facets to our knowledge of the avian world. We take this opportunity to thank Amritha for sending us the photograph of the mating Coursers, that allowed us to trace backwards and present the points we have raised above. We hope this will also encourage other members to write in with their own observations.

Literature cited:

1. Taher, Humayun, Bindu Madhavi Racherla, Sharada Annamaraju & M Lawrence, 2015. Variations in the breeding season of the Indian Courser. *Pitta New Series* 12 (3): 5.
2. Ali, S., & Ripley, S.D., 1987. *Compact handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka*. 2nd ed. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Report - HSBC Bird Race, Hyderabad, 8th February 2015

Shafaat Ulla



Photo: Hemanth Kumar

It was a pleasant Sunday morning when the sixth edition of the Bird Race was slated to be flagged off from Hotel The Plaza, Begumpet.

An annual event sponsored by HSBC, and promoted by Yuhina Eco-Media of Mumbai, these races are held in several other cities also. In Hyderabad, the race is jointly organised by BSAP and Great Hyderabad Adventure Club (GHAC).



Photo: Mahipal Rao

This year too, as always, the response was overwhelming - the total number of participants was 88, including 21 ladies, a record indeed!

The participants were divided into 23 teams, and the team vehicles were flagged off promptly at 7:00AM by Diyanat of GHAC, after they had been given their breakfast hampers and log books. They were free to go wherever they wanted, as long as they returned by 5:30PM to the Hotel, and submitted their log books to the judges for scrutiny.

The judges, viz. Mr. Ramakrishna Rao (presently Curator, Nehru Zoological Park), JVD Moorty and Humayun Taher, are all Life Members of our Society and experienced birders. They collected all the log books and got down to the task of checking and grading them according to the number of bird species seen.

While the judges were busy with their task, the evening function started with the joint welcome address by our President Aasheesh and Diyanat, President, GHAC. This was followed by a few words by Mr. Sam Alex, Branch Head, HSBC, and finally a very nice speech by the Chief Guest, Mr. G.V. Prasad, Co-Chairman & CEO, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd, and a Life member of BSAP. After this, the Captains of each team were requested to come with their team members and say a few words about their experiences of the day. This was most interesting and a lot of fun.

This time around, there were no prizes. Instead, each participant was given a pen set with HSBC logo. This was very much appreciated by one and all. Finally the Vote of Thanks was given by Surekha, followed by a sumptuous dinner.

Results:

Team / Members	No. of species	Bird of the Day
MUNIAS - Sudhir, Anita, Sathwik, Gowthama	146	Crested Treeswift
PITTAS - Mahipal, Gulshan, Kalpana, Santosh	140	Asian Paradise-flycatcher
FALCONS - Asif, Hemant, Siddharth, Ashwin	131	Eurasian Blackbird

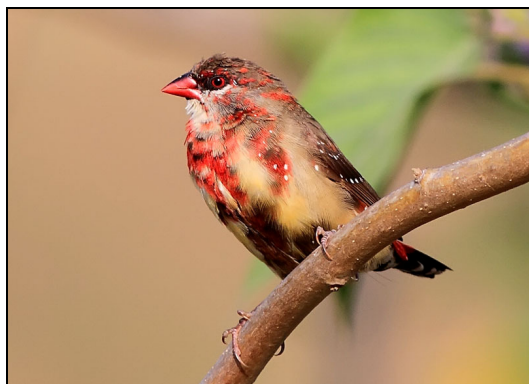
Some photos taken during the Bird Race:



Greater Flamingo (Photo: Hemanth Kumar)



Blue-faced Malkoha (Photo: Hemanth Kumar)



Red Avadavat (Photo: Hemanth Kumar)



Blue-tailed Bee-eater
(Photo: Hemanth Kumar)



Crested Hawk Eagle (Photo: Hemanth Kumar)



Crested Serpent Eagle (Photo: Hemanth Kumar)



Red-wattled Lapwing (Photo: Hemanth Kumar)



Rufous Treepie (Photo: Hemanth Kumar)



Bronze-winged Jacana juvenile (Photo: Hemanth Kumar)



Bar-headed Goose (Photo: Hemanth Kumar)

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)



Purple Heron (Chennai, 14-04-2015)

Order: Pelecaniformes

Family: Ardeidae

Genus: *Ardea*

Species: *A. purpurea*

Size: 78-90 cm

Description & distribution: The Purple Heron is a large member of the heron family, Ardeidae. Its wingspan can range between 120-152 cm. Tall and slender, the Purple Heron is delicately coloured. The adult has a chestnut head and neck with a black stripe down the sides, slate-grey mantle and upperwing-coverts, and a dark chestnut belly and underwing-coverts. Legs and feet are dull yellow. The crown has two long black scapular plumes, which develop chestnut-buff tips during breeding. The long, fine bill is yellow, and becomes brighter yellow during breeding season. At rest, it shows a deep chestnut shoulder-patch. The juvenile has a buffish neck, black crown and brownish mantle. The upperwing-coverts are also brownish with rufous-buff fringes.

The Purple Heron breeds in Africa, southern and central Europe, and southern and eastern Asia. Northern Asian populations winter in more southern parts of Asia, whereas the European populations migrate to Africa in winter. Four sub-species are recognized: *A. p. purpurea*, the nominate race, found in Africa, Europe (north, to the Netherlands), and south-western Asia (east to Kazakhstan); *A. p. manilensis*, found in Asia from Pakistan east to Philippines and Indonesia, and north to parts of Russia; *A. p. madagascariensis*, found in Madagascar; and *A. p. bournei*, found in Cape Verde islands. This last race, *A. p. bournei*, is also known as Bourne's Heron, and is considered by some authors as a part of *A. p. purpurea*, and as a distinct species *Ardea bournei*, by some others.

Behaviour: The Purple Heron is not a gregarious bird, and is usually seen singly or in very small groups. It prefers inland waters with tall cover. It tends to keep within reed-beds - more so than other herons - and can be quite inconspicuous, often being noticed only when it moves or flies. It feeds in shallow water, and can stay motionless for fairly long intervals, while waiting for prey to approach closer; it may also slowly stalk its prey. Its diet is wide, and includes frogs, fish, rodents, salamanders, snakes, insects, spiders and even small birds.

Its flight is slow and ponderous. In flight, its neck is retracted, like most herons and bitterns, but the bulge of the recoiled snake-like neck is much more pronounced than, say, the Grey Heron; protruding feet seem large, and underwing-coverts are purplish in adult and buff in juvenile birds.

Nesting: In north Africa and Europe, the Purple Heron breeds from around April to June. In north Asia, it breeds from June to October, and further south, the breeding season may vary with the rainy season cycle. It nests gregariously, forming nesting colonies in reed-beds or trees close to large lakes, marshes or other wetlands. The nest is a large stick nest, often balanced on folded-over reeds. The typical clutch consists of 2-8 pale blue-green eggs, with one clutch per year being the norm, though replacement clutches can occur. Both parents participate in incubation duties.

Local name: The Purple Heron is known as 'nari' or 'lal anjan' in Hindi, 'yerra narayana pakshi' in Telugu and 'chen naarai' in Tamil.

Our experience at Bird Race 2015

Sagarika Melkote

The word “bird race” has always evoked mixed reactions from people around me - amusement, curiosity, incredulousness and sometimes, plain “are you nuts?” looks. One person actually asked me if we let caged birds free and track them to see which one flies fastest! She was stunned into an open-mouthed silence when I told her that it was BSAP’s annual jamboree, where we form teams and rush around the twin cities trying to spot as many bird species as possible.

And so, the 2015 bird race was no different - teams congregated bright and early at the venue, raring to go. What I thought was our very imaginative team name “Inglorious Bustards” was abruptly shortened to “Eagles” by the Honorary Secretary, who told me save my imagination for another time. The unexpected absence of our fourth team member was quickly filled in by a lady who’d come all the way from Goa.

So there we were, two participants from previous bird races (Vinay & self), one newbie (Ravi) and the lady from Goa (Tallulah). With teams around us all huddling and speaking in hushed whispers, we too, followed suit and tried to strategize. A exchange of hot words and a couple of arguments later, we had our routes all mapped out, ready to go. Vinay would drive, Ravi and I would keep our eyes peeled and Tallulah would do likewise in her own car, tailing us. A visibly excited Ravi said that we must spot at least one species of Eagle, to justify our team name.

Race flagged off, we headed straight to Narsapur forest, stopping at a couple of water bodies on the way. Pretty fruitful because we had a list of about 15 common species by the time we hit the forest.

Narsapur forest has never failed to amaze - with an abundance of Long-tailed Shrikes and Red Avadavats, the water body within the forest threw in its share of Openbills, Grey Herons, Stilts, Sandpipers, Terns, Spotbills, Jacanas, Grebes, Teals, Kingfishers, not to mention an amphibian’s shell - probably that of an Indian Pond Terrapin, promptly packed into his backpack by Ravi! Tallulah, unfortunately, had to catch an afternoon flight back to Goa and left at this juncture, albeit with some degree of reluctance.

The walk back from the lake yielded a female Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark, almost invisible in its camouflage but spotted, nevertheless, by Ravi, the human optical scanner. Binoculars are wasted on the man, he managed to spot a Paradise-flycatcher in a bamboo thicket and a Crested Serpent Eagle in a tree nearly 300 metres away, before Vinay and I pinned it down with our binoculars!

We left Narsapur, pretty satisfied with ourselves; our bird list had grown considerably and we even had one species of Eagle in it, doing justice to our team name. The plan now was head out to Gandipet and KBR Park after that. It’s a fact that sometimes even the best laid plans go wrong. Somewhere, after getting onto the highway and coming to an agreement about using Google maps, we exited onto what we thought was the right bypass road.

Google continued to reassure us that we were on the right track, while in fact we had no idea where we were. Maybe it was a blessing in disguise, for we found ourselves on a country road, completely devoid of traffic, surrounded by fields. Pied Bushchat, Brown Shrikes and a male Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark were added to the list. Hunger was starting to gnaw at our insides, when the unexpected happened.

“There is a huge raptor on that tree...” from Ravi, of course.

Brakes screeched, the car stopped just short of a huge ditch...

About 300 metres off the road, on a tree shorn of leaves, was perched this magnificent specimen. Binoculars trained on him, Ravi and I were at a complete loss about its id. Frenzied references to the field guide followed, more features were observed and noted, field guide referred to again. All the while, His Royal Highness just sat still, taking in the surroundings, least bothered that he was the current object of interest and speculation. Once in a way, he would turn and show off his left profile, then his right and once, for our benefit, he even fluffed himself! About fifteen minutes passed before we arrived at a consensus - the raptor was, beyond all doubt, the Short-toed Snake Eagle - AND a LIFER for all of us! Right there, we made the decision - this raptor would be our “Bird of the Day”.

As if on cue, the raptor then spread its wings, rose into the air and glided smoothly out of sight. We silently thanked him for staying long enough for us to identify him.

Hunger pangs forgotten, we continued along the same road, still believing Google. Some distance ahead, I spotted a fairly huge bird (or birds) flying into a corn field off the road. Vinay applied the brakes again at my shout; it’s just as well that we were on these country roads with no traffic, the way we were stopping as and when we felt like it. Ravi and I hopped off to take a closer look. Once near the corn field, Ravi went a little ahead and peeped into the rows of corn.

“There is a pig here...are you sure you saw a bird?”

Now, I may not possess laser scanners for eyes but I was pretty sure I saw a big bird (or birds). Anyway, with Ravi’s confirmation that there was a pig in the corn field, I started to doubt myself and the two of us walked back to the car.

Maybe we were two minds with one thought, because, we both stopped suddenly. I knew what Ravi was thinking - pigs do not fly and whatever I saw, very definitely flew into the cornfield. We went back for a second look, and, lo and behold, there were about 5 or 6 peafowl in the field!

Thrilled that our national bird made it to our list, we followed the road again. Google didn’t really let us down and we found ourselves in familiar Shankarpalli, where we sat down to a very late lunch. Time constraints meant we had to be back at the

reporting venue to submit our list. The list by itself, looked pretty

impressive; we had about 70 species listed.

Shortly we were back at the venue, exchanging notes with the others, sharing experiences, the sound of laughter and cheery voices filling the hall. Some folks had notched up lists of over 130 species, and everyone had something memorable to share.

For Vinay and me, this was the third year of participation in the Bird Race and every year, we had consistently averaged 68-70 species. When it was our turn to speak, we timidly asked if there were prizes to be had for consistency and were told, regretfully, that there were none!

Not that it mattered - prize or no prize, the annual Bird Race is a unique exercise, and it's pretty much guaranteed that you will spot a species that you have never seen before, given the time you spend out on the field.

And for that, I believe, every birder worth his salt must try it at least once.

Bird Humour

(contributed by JVD Moorthy)



(From Times of India, date not available)

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

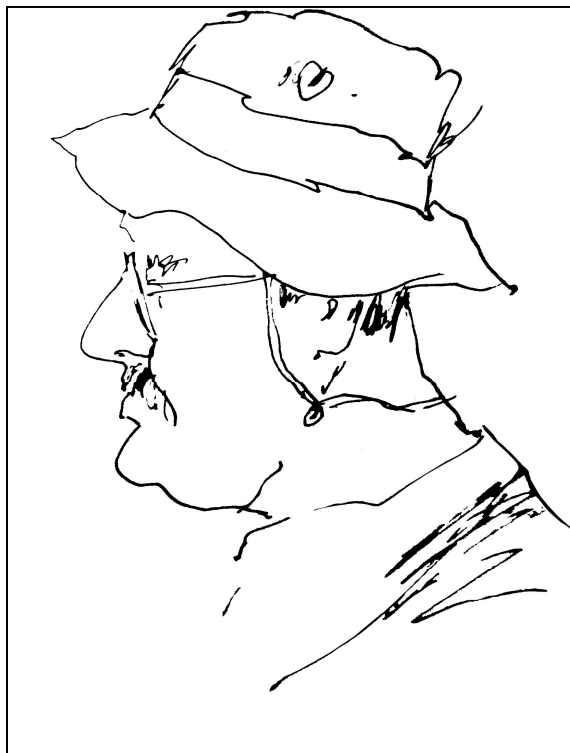
For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)

Editors' Note

Some time back, we had informed our members of our plan to bring out a Special Issue of the Pitta to honour the memory of late Shri Siraj Taher (1942-2010), President Emeritus of BSAP.

We had requested you to send us articles, writeups, anecdotes, photographs and any other personal memories that you may like to share, about the time you have spent birding or otherwise interacting with Sirajsaab.

We present here the results of this endeavour, and hope that in some small way, we have been able to give tribute to a man who was one of the contemporary giants of ornithology.



S is for Shikra¹

Aasheesh Pittie

In 2010 I lost two people who were very dear to me. They had studied in the same school, lived out their lives in the same city, had many common friends, at least one common hobby, and both died, within two months of each other, in the same hospital. Both were paterfamilias of more than one 'family' – philately and ornithology. Both had a tremendous impact on my life. Their journey into the sun was uphill.

¹ The title is a reflection of Helen Macdonald's visceral account of coming to terms with her father's death, through the numbing ordeal of training a Goshawk. I've borrowed and changed her book's title, here, for recalling my time with Siraj sahib has been no less wrenching. Too, he celebrated the shikra.

Siraj sahib was passionate about birds. That is how we met the first time, at a meeting of the fledgling Birdwatchers' Club of Andhra Pradesh [BCAP]. The fact that he was a generation older than me was never discussed between us, while everything else was. The Hyderabad he grew up in, the social culture of *tehzeeb* that made him what he was, has now vanished. He came to birds in the best way possible: First, pursuing them for sport, once a gentlemanly pastime, played to exacting rules; then swerving towards conservation, like so many of his enlightened contemporaries. I pressed him once, to tell me why he gave up his gun. He'd shot a sambhar once, a poor shot, he confessed. The injured stag blundered off into the forest. Raised in a tradition that valued a pricked conscience, he decided to follow the stricken animal and put out its agony. But the sambhar fought the inevitable for several hours, staying either unsighted, or out of range from its pursuer. When finally he caught up with it, the profusely bleeding animal was finished. The sight of the dead animal, and the realization that here was a living being that need not have died, had indeed tried to escape death, moved him immensely. With the bursting of its heart, that sambhar converted its nemesis forever towards conservation.

After a couple of outings together as part of the BCAP, we began to hit it off. To this too, there was a quirky angle, which showed the *apnapan* of those days.

One evening he met an old school friend of his in Riyazath Husain's iconic bookshop on Abid Road, A. A. Husain & Co. After the pleasantries and backslapping subsided, under the convivial eye of the senior Mr Husain, Siraj sahib asked him, "*Arre, ek bachcha aata hai hamare chidiyon ke club mein. Tu jaanta kya?*" In a city steeped in social niceties, the use of the "*tu*" was reserved for those that were dear to one; unlike the rough meaning it is ascribed today.

"*Apna hi bachcha hai*, Siraj," chuckled my father. Again that *tehzeeb* – not the grasping "*mera bachcha*", but the inclusive "*apna*".

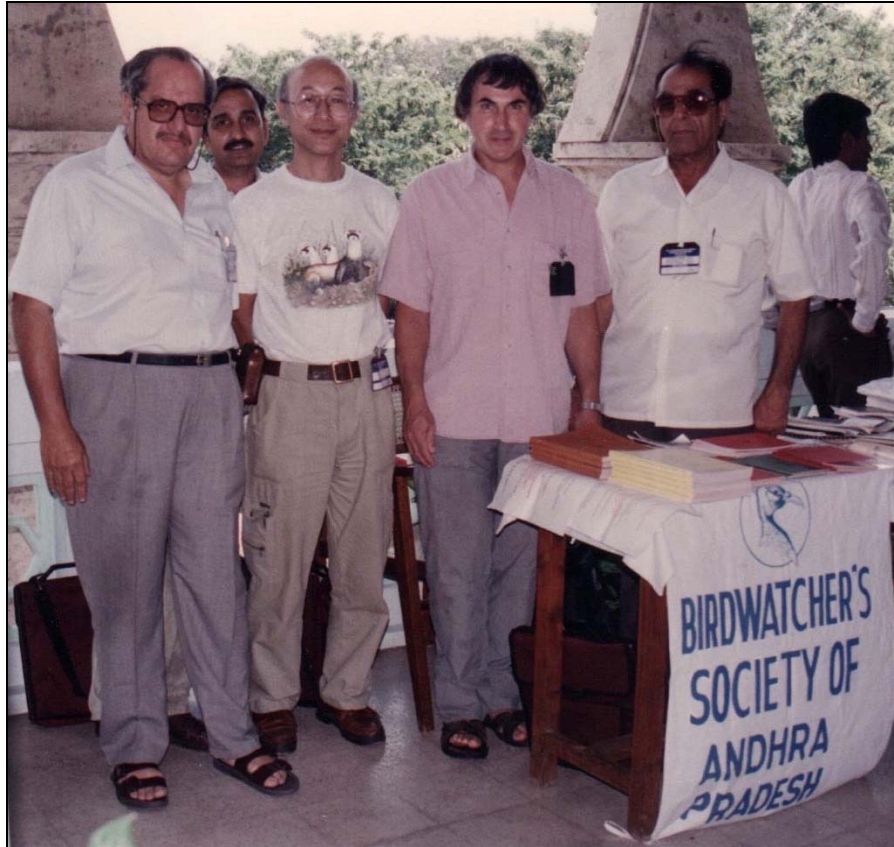
In the next outing, he stumped me with a loud "*Arrey, tum bolaich nahin ki Murari ke bete hain*". Seeing me taken aback, he chortled the bookshop episode. After that, my birding outings had no querulous or disapproving looks at home. I was going out with *shareef log*. Thus began a life-long association with one of the finest people I've known. In some matters he took me under his wing, in some we did things together.

That *shareef* quality of the man, I think, was ultimately what drew so many people to the BCAP, which was rechristened the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh [BSAP] upon its registration. The hierarchy of the organization was never apparent to any of the participants. Except for Mr Pushp Kumar, top gun in the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department, who was thus accorded a genteel deference by the elderly birders, the subtle unsavouriness of implied superiority, whether of rank or knowledge, never left its residue on any of us youngsters. Everyone travelled together in the Forest Department's jeeps, all walked to where the birds were, victuals were mutually partaken, and the day's count discussed later in a much-anticipated circle of friendship. Topical and irreverent banter, and repartee, were the norm. This was an exceptional illustration of the altruistic spirit of those who planned, promoted, popularized, and participated in this pastime. And to my mind, the single factor that contributed to the organisation's successful promotion of an undoubtedly new concept of outdoor activity for the citizenry of Hyderabad. Plus, who could deny that element of thrill, shrouded in the past of fondly recalled boyhood days, of a Boy Scout's revving adrenalin, of a golden nostalgia that tugs adults to another shot at nirvana? The wilderness, and its wildlings, does such things to men.

Every specialized activity has its own terminology, and ornithology was replete with enough to confound a polyglot; its lexicon spanned classical European languages, English, Sanskrit, and the immense mythologies of the world's cultures! This hurdle notwithstanding, our motley group soon cobbled together a bristling argot of nicknames, abbreviated codes, hand and eye signage, and often, a whistled mimicry of surprising drollness, pulsating with distinct onomatopoeic bemusement. Newcomers stood stupefied by this bunch of loonies telling

time on a tree while trying to locate a bird! Siraj sahib was privy to this notorious gang, and thoroughly enjoyed the perplexity of the uninitiated. Being accepted into the group was considered a rite of passage.

His sense of fun was legendary. It often kept in good humour a tired, flagging group returning after a day of slim pickings. A master raconteur, he spiced tea breaks with stories from vintage days. In turns becoming moist-eyed-sentimental for the *Days of the Beloved*, or rasping street-slang *Hyderabadi* in his baritone.



The BSAP 'pavilion' at the first Pan-Asian Ornithological Conference in Coimbatore, 9–16 November 1996.
L to R: Siraj Taher, M. S. Kulkarni, Noritaka Ichida (Vice-President of BirdLife International, and Chairman, BirdLife Asia Council),
Tim Inskipp, and Maj. Ahmed Abdul Aziz. Photo: Aasheesh Pittie.

For Siraj sahib, every birder was special, and welcome to his home. I met many heavyweights of the birding world there, and cannot recall even one person who was not at as much ease, as he would be in his own drawing room. The city's birding lads walked in and out as if they were visiting their own homes. To me it was always a special place. I went there for all the reasons that a deepening friendship draws two people to spend time together. Our discussions ranged from ornithology, to social behavior, politics, the philosophy of morality, and ethics; the nuances of Urdu *shaayari*; the importance of art in comprehending the world; the unceasing turmoil that was the status of our environment; the way to take the Society forward – several ideas springing up spontaneously during conversation, which we worked on and made something of. But the deepest moments were the silences we lapsed into between words, ruminating, pondering, or simply savouring thoughts that rush in at the end of a satisfying flow of words. I always took away the comforting thought that here was someone who I could speak with about subjects that shone with clarity once the polishing strokes of give and take had burnished their cantankerous edges.



L to R: Siraj Taher, Richard Grimmett, and Aasheesh Pittie (1996). Photo: Aasheesh Pittie

The heady plan of collating our own checklist of the birds of Andhra Pradesh was cast during one such evening. Why could we not do it? It was the first step to more comprehensive ornithologies – but this was achievable by just the two of us. As often happens, the force with which an idea hits one, it also pushes out and lays bare methodologies for fructifying it in the same instant. I do not think it took us more than half an hour to decide our workflow and apportion our responsibilities. Subsequently, there must have been innumerable meetings to iron out creases, to enjoy quaint discoveries in published accounts from the past, to streamline every step so that both were on the same page with regard to content, presentation, citation, taxonomy, etc. But there was no major change; no rollback of methods; no U-turn on our road map.



Release of the *Checklist* in 1989, in the corridor of the A. P. Forest Dept. building.
L to R: Maj. Ahmed Abdul Aziz, Pushp Kumar IFS, S. Ashok Kumar. I am talking about the work,
a stack of which can be seen on the bottom left of the picture. Photo: Aasheesh Pittie.

Comparatively, the translation of the *Birds of Southern India*, by Richard Grimmett and Tim Inskipp (2005), into Telugu, was a minefield. Collaborations were imperative because he only had a good working knowledge

of the language, could be the ideal Telugu-speaking ornithologist, but was not proficient enough to take on the entire work himself. Translating the extensive lexicon of birding, into a language that seemed to have no specific, definitive words to suit scientific interpretations, had to be executed by a twin-nibbed pen: One, that wrote with bold hearty strokes, delineating the work; the other, with the fine point, working in all the telling details that illuminated the manuscript. I was the troubleshooter who tried to unclog detritus in the workflow, to ensure smooth progress. Not least of these was dealing with the names for the colours of plumage, “brownish-yellow,” “blue-green”, etc. Ultimately we did get our own Telugu colour palette! Siraj sahib worked hard and long at the manuscript, and may have taken it through at least six proofs, after, often nerve-wracking meetings with the translators. The fine pointed pens scratched away day and night, and I would notice fresh stacks of papers during our daily meetings. He had this thing for coloured inks and would mark up his sheets with differently coloured inks, each colour linking a unique chain of thought. He wrestled with extant Telugu bird names, which were invariably of a generic nature, and had the distinction of coining dozens of new ones. But it was mighty frustrating work, and often did I catch him in a reverie, absentmindedly sucking at the end of a pencil. The lack of a consensus, the engine that could have driven this naming work, rankled him. Invitees never bothered to respond, except a few, for which he was so grateful. Dialect, that verbal filigree of distinctiveness within a language, a culture, tortured him, till one day he realized the only way forward was to ignore it. One could not please everyone. When published (2007), it was a work that justified his sense of achievement, in that of his team, and in his pride that the Society was a co-author.



Siraj Taher speaking at the release function of the Telugu translation of *Birds of Southern India* (2005)
L to R: A. K. Malhotra IFS PCCF APFD, Asad R. Rahmani (Director, Bombay Natural History Society),
and Shafaat Ulla. Photo: Aasheesh Pittie.

Siraj sahib, and indeed, Pushp Kumar, worked with an extraordinary zeal to promote an awareness of birds among Hyderabad’s citizenry, and as a consequence, highlighted the environment we collectively belong to. The media, both print and radio, smelled the potential of a unique angle to pitch stories, and people began to discuss birds, the urban environment, and even the activities of the BSAP! Birds have always attracted mankind, and when brought out from the realms of literature, poetry, art, or even mythology, into the ambit of casual conversation, they ushered delight, rekindled memory, nudged people to look around and notice the natural world. The quiddity of our surroundings during our growing up years is deeply ingrained in our bones, recumbent though it may lie as we rush about our busy days. But comes a moment when memory stirs, awakened by a petrichor sprinkled upon our passivity by people like Siraj sahib, and a delightful facet of the natural world is miraculously visible to us. Birds can charm the most indifferent of people!

If passion fuels altruism, the result is joyous. Siraj sahib's involvement with BSAP was such a phase of his life. Whether he was organizing a field outing; writing in long hand the next month's programme on *all* the post cards that he would himself mail at the post office; correcting proofs of the Society's publications; sitting with the patience of a Buddha for various permissions from a forest official; answering media persons, even when they came unprepared and posed prosaic queries; preparing environmental assessment reports of places he deeply cared about, like Kolleru Lake, and sending them to the concerned authorities on behalf of the Society; speaking to students; chairing symposia – it was all “for the birds”, as though he had an oath in heaven!



Siraj Taher being honoured as the first President Emeritus of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh (30 August 2009).
 Standing L to R: K. Nanda Kumar, Umesh Mani, Shanti Mani, Siraj Taher, K. Bhardwaj, and Shafaat Ulla.
 Seated L to R: Aasheesh Pittie, J. V. D. Moorthy, Sushil Kapadia, and M. S. Kulkarni. Photo: Aasheesh Pittie.

And when his penchant for the living bird needed a rest, out would come his philatelic collection, with *birds* as its theme! He worked on it whenever he found time, and even displayed it successfully (winning competitions) in several philatelic exhibitions. The Forest Department regularly petitioned him to display it during their annual Wildlife Week celebrations, and he would willingly oblige. After all, it presented a fantastic opportunity to convert the visiting school kids to a lifetime love of birds, and philately!

He took great pleasure in the company of life-long friends, in the earthy delight of seasonal fruit, in the song of garden birds, in the pressure of his granddaughter's tiny hand around his finger. In a sense, he did see that world in a grain of sand. And when the end came in the month of January of that fateful year, he had a befitting farewell. A gentle evening descended; the annual *numaish* that he enjoyed with his dear Ayesha flung high its illuminated, rotating, giant-wheel; Mukesh's poignant, pathos-filled “*Jeena yahan, marna yahan*” wafted from that direction; and as clods of his hometown earth sprinkled the path of his onward journey, a pair of spotted owlets, his endearingly-named *Chakwa-Chakwi*, exchanged yarns inside a dusty tamarind.

Two months later, that other person, his friend, my father, too passed away.

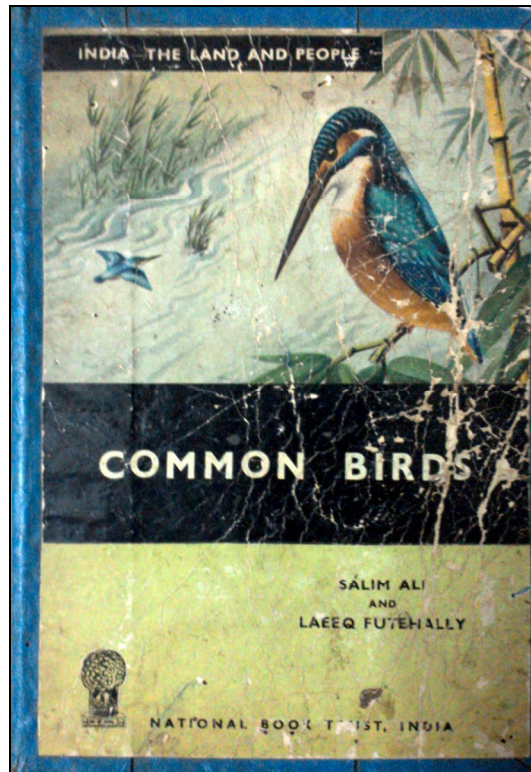
The Gift of a Book

Humayun Taher

It was on a hot May afternoon in 1979 that I, a young lad of some nine-odd summers, spoke two words that were to change my life forever! I remember that day well; I had just finished my daily ritual of watering the plants in the garden and sprinkling water on the dusty verandah where the family foregathered in the cool of the late summer afternoons; the summer vacation was upon us and I no longer had recourse to the massive textbooks that are the usual accompaniment of a 9-year-old schoolboy. In this backdrop, I made my momentous observation, albeit in a peevish voice - "I'm bored...!"

The stout gentleman taking his ease in his favourite easy-chair beside me gave me a stern look. Truth to tell, I was (and remained for all time) a trifle scared of the old man! I wondered, quailing a little under that stern grey eye, what I had said that seemed to warrant a scolding. But then the eyes softened, and my father told me that the person who could make so ignorant a statement as being bored within his or her own house was a poor example of humanity. Surely, he said, a confirmed book-lover himself, with the presence of so many books in the house to be read, one should not want in the matter of things to do? I confess that, like most schoolboys perchance, my association with books was limited to the scholastic tomes that we had to pore over under the stern and watchful eyes of our pedagogue. That it was possible to read books for mere pleasure seemed to me to be slightly far-fetched.

Running his fingers through his grizzled hair, Dad heaved himself out of his chair and went inside. He reappeared carrying a small hard-back book bound in blue imitation leather. The front of the book carried a striking picture of some colourful species of fowl. I wondered, as I stared morosely at this literary masterpiece, whether I was expected to use this to while away my boredom. My father put this book into my hands and told me, with a smile, that it was now mine! I wasn't well-pleased because I had a sort of sneaking suspicion that I would later on be expected to pass an examination on the little masterpiece. But the book did have a certain fascination. I looked closely at the title - "Common Birds" by Salim Ali and Laeq Futehally: it is, alas, not a very common book these days.



Turning over the pages, I found myself fascinated by the colourful pictures of the birds depicted. And the text too was charmingly simple; no erudite commentary here... it was written in plain language, easily understood, and even more easily grasped. I sat there and devoured that book as I had never done any of my schoolbooks before – or since!

One of the first things I noticed was that several of the birds depicted in the pictures were creatures I was already familiar with. As a member of a household that regularly featured fowl of many sorts at table, and also on the strength of a large aviary in the house crammed with diverse little birds that were, until this supreme moment, merely "dicky birds", I was able to identify some of the birds myself. I learned that the very tasty "teetar" is known as the Grey Partridge; the tiny little "lal munia" was the Red Munia or Avadavat and the "jungli badakh" with the bright yellow beak that I remembered as being exceedingly delicious, was the Spotbill or Grey Duck. The learning of these names seemed to me to bring these interesting fowls closer to me. I cannot say for certain, but I do think that probably, it was that first read of that book given to me by my father, which converted me forever into a birder. And life has never been the same again! Too, I am never ever bored!!!

The man who presented me with that book on that warm May afternoon in 1979 was my father, Mr. Siraj Ahmed Taher!

* * *

The Extraordinary Birdman

JVD Moorty

"What are you writing?" enquired a gruff voice. It was our – my spouse was with me – first field trip with the BSAP to the Agricultural University in 1983. I showed the Voice my bird list, the last entry being the Purple-rumped Sunbird. We were rank beginners with ID knowledge of birds in single digits. The said bird alighted on a bush nearby and we were asked to identify it, which we successfully failed to do! Sirajsaab – that's how I had always called him – then very gently told us that birdwatching involves using one's own eyes and ears first, before referring to a book or blindly following the names called out by someone else – which is what we were doing. A lesson taught and learnt, and a new birdwatcher added to the flock. He then proceeded to show us the illustration in Salim Ali's *A Pictorial Guide to Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* and explain how to complete the picture. I later bought this book in Delhi for a princely sum of Rs. 108/-, and which was my companion on many a field trip for a long, long time, and something that I still refer to nostalgically even today.

Over the years Sirajsaab, whom, along with the late Mr. Pushp Kumar, I consider my birding mentor and guide, shared a kind of friendship that I cherish to this day. Now I share the same rapport with Humayun, who is carrying on the legacy of his father with aplomb.

Sirajsaab was always at hand to explain the nuances of observing birds and making field notes, to any novice floundering in the labyrinths of watching and identifying birds. He spoke with such infectious passion that it wasn't difficult to fall in love with this hobby that, today, is just as fascinating for me as it was 30+ years ago.

After our daughter, Shefali, was born, he told me that he had nothing more to do with me socially and that he would interact with her more than he would with me. He was totally fascinated by her telephone manners and said he had never heard anyone so young responding on the telephone the way she did, with extreme politeness.

His ready wit and command over the language were phenomenal. Once I called him up requesting him to explain the concept of 'dowry' in a Muslim wedding as I had to translate a document into German and needed to understand the concept. His immediate reaction was to sternly tell me to put down the phone, so that he could

contact my spouse as I appeared to be contemplating bigamy!! Of course I did finally get my explanation, but not without having had my leg pulled.

His telephone calls – cellphones weren't invented back then – always started with a greeting and an enquiry about whether I was free to talk, before he said anything else. Whenever Shefali answered the phone, he would first talk to her before he would ask for me. I could see this indulgence later with his grandchild.

And who could forget his a-kind-of-green-coloured car. A Fiat of the early 1960s with a number plate APC 1. (Humayun! Apologies!!).

When his health took a turn he told me nothing was going to happen to him and that he would be still be around. My last interaction with him was in 2009 at Aasheesh's place where he was honoured by the BSAP for his indefatigable services to the Society and to the conservation of birds.

On 7th January 2010, I received a message that Sirajsaab had passed away. I was in Thailand and never felt as helpless as I did at that moment. I lost a mentor, a friend and my birding "guru".

* * *

Siraj Taher – a Scholar and a Gentleman

Suhel Quader

My father had been a schoolmate of Siraj saab, and when I showed an interest in wildlife he naturally took me to meet him (coincidentally, I was a schoolmate of Humayun, though that wasn't how the connection was made). My earliest recollections of him are from my visits to his old home on Road No. 1, Banjara Hills, with its large trees and cool rooms; and his father resting in a beautiful old armchair. This was around 1984 or 1985. Since then, I have spent many hours with him, talking about birds at home and on countless field trips.

Rather than reminisce about these times together, I will recall some special qualities of his qualities that I have later tried to hold up as a standard for myself.

As a scholar of birds, Siraj saab was a meticulous worker. He would carefully write and draw his observations in his notebook, as he walked around in the field. He always insisted that we youngsters note down what we had seen immediately because, as he said, memory is frail and fickle. He was also honest to a fault, never one to jump to conclusions about the identification of a difficult bird. In those days, the only comprehensive guide to the birds of India was the *Pictorial Guide*², in which the artist had bravely managed the difficult feat of making groups of similar-looking species (like warblers, pipits) utterly indistinguishable. We would stare at the plates, like devout supplicants, until we threw our hands up, having decided that divine intercession was not forthcoming. Our last resort was the *Handbook*³. To Siraj saab (as to us all), this was like a Bible, and he would exclaim in glee whenever some peculiar behaviour observed in the field was found to be already perfectly described in it by Salim Ali. "The Old Man is right again", he would exclaim.

Apart from this, and perhaps above all, Siraj saab was a kind man, quick to praise and appreciate. He made special efforts to get youngsters interested, and help them through the first stages of trying to identify common species. When he did criticise some transgression of mine in manners or (even worse) bird identification, it was

² *Pictorial Guide*: "A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent": by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley. Illustrations by John Henry Dick.

³ *Handbook*: "Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka" by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley.

always with a twinkle in his eye, and with a ready forgiveness thereafter.

For him, bird watching was a pleasure and a delight. But a birdwatcher's calling, he felt, must go beyond – to careful documentation and from that to stewardship and conservation. From this, I believe, we can all take inspiration.

We will all die one day. But from the way we live our lives, from our actions and from the lessons we teach, we pass fragments of ourselves down the generations. Siraj saab was an exemplar for so many of us; and in us he lives on.

* * *

Siraj – the Birdman of Hyderabad

Shafaat Ulla

My association with Siraj goes back to more than three decades. In fact we were family friends and our children, almost the same ages, grew up together. We used to meet very often, stag or with families, at parties, pot-luck dinners and picnics.

Irrespective of where we met, Siraj would always regale me with interesting anecdotes about birds and their behaviour. These I always listened to with fascination and which, subconsciously, created in me an interest in birds. Let me recall a few of his '*gems*' which got permanently imprinted in my mind, which may also be of interest to the readers:

--- Hairy caterpillars, avoided by most birds, are loved by the Cuckoos, who dip them in water before swallowing!

--- Shrikes impale extra food on thorns for later consumption – hence known as the 'butcher birds'.

--- Kingfishers always swallow fish head first to avoid sharp dorsal fins. Also, while diving for the fish, they correct their dive angle to compensate for the light refraction. Remember dipping a ruler half way in a bucket of water and observing how it looks bent?

--- Some ground nesting birds like Lapwings resort to 'broken wing display' to lure predators away from their nest.

--- Swallows have very short but unusually broad beaks and the resultant large gape helps in catching insects easily in flight – 'feeding on the wing'.

--- Many seed- and grain-eating birds like Sparrows, feed their chicks insects, because of high protein value and easy digestibility.

I could go on and on recounting many such interesting '*gems*'. In fact Siraj would repeatedly tell me to join the society and I would postpone it, although, in my heart of hearts, I did want to join. Actually I was busy with IGNA, the German Returnees Association, of which I was the founder member and President for about a decade, and this took up a pretty big chunk of my spare time. However, I gave up on being on the managing committee of IGNA by the late nineties and utilised this opportunity to jump onto the BSAP bandwagon.

I remember my first outing with Siraj & BSAP was to the Manjeera Barrage. But strangely instead of going over the dam, we went below it and did birding in and around the dry river bed, me following Siraj closely. The

first bird I noticed, Siraj identified as the Large Cormorant, a ‘lifer’ for me! Of course many more trips followed, always under his tutelage, and I was hooked!

Since I was taking my baby steps in birding, I started becoming more aware of birds. One such exotic bird that I saw was in a tree in front of our house. As I could not identify it, I made a sketch and noted down different features and colours and at the first opportunity showed it to Siraj. He immediately identified it as the Indian Treepie. He was extremely happy with the way I had made the notes and declared that this was the right way to do birding and asked me to keep it up. He then proceeded to his book shelf and gifted me a copy of the book “A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent” by Dr. Salim Ali & S. Dillon Ripley, (1983). I am still the proud owner of this classic and I refer to it often.

Siraj was a voracious reader and his knowledge of birds was inexhaustible. Whenever we went on a birding trip, he made special efforts to gather around him the new-comers, including myself, and apart from identifying birds he would patiently explain about different aspects of birds and birding in general – don’t wear bright colours, don’t talk loudly, don’t point fingers, don’t disturb the birds, etc, etc.

Before I conclude, I would like to advise one and all that we must carry his legacy forward. During trips, the seniors should make it a point to teach and share their knowledge with the new comers, just as Siraj would have done. This, in my opinion, is the best way to make birding popular among the younger generation and citizens of Hyderabad.

I will always miss you, Siraj.

* * *

Siraj Taher

Rajashekar Tummala

I became a member of BSAP due to the encouragement of Aasheesh and Sirajji. When the National Seminar on Eastern Ghats was being organised by Environment Protection Training & Research Institute in Tirupati, Siraj A Taherji and I co-authored a joint paper, a Historical Review of Ornithological Surveys in Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh, with special reference to Vernay's Survey of Eastern Ghats, and many other novel ornithological surveys; it is listed under South Asian Ornithological bibliography compiled by Aasheesh.

I used to interact with Sirajji during the Waterfowl Census between the years 1999 and 2003, which were compiled by him. He used to invite me to his study and share the repository of the references.

I miss the great philatelist too. Seeing his exclusive bird postage stamps, I too had started collecting “Endemic Birds of the World”. I posted to him a spare copy of Paradise Flycatchers issued by Postal Department, India, for his compilation on Bird Stamps of India. I shared with him stamps issued by other Indian Feudatory states and French India and Portuguese India, which issued stamps on Indian soil. He wanted to publish these in the BHNS journal.

Once, I spotted a very large clutch of common sparrows in Dorli mandal, near Mancheri, Adilabad, in 2003. But for conserving and protecting them, that particular record was not published. As Editor of the Pitta, I acknowledged his seasoned acumen and forethought.

His wit and ability to answer naive questions of the new members was par excellence.

* * *

A Rare Bird

Surabhi Bharati

I do not recall the exact year, but it was probably the early 1980s when I was introduced to ‘Taher Saab’ on a rainy day when I had gone along with Moorty, my spouse, for a lark. We were being picked up in a forest jeep to go bird watching! It was manna / ‘maina’ from heaven for hostellers starved of food, deprived of transport and any kind of adventure in the outdoors! I was a research scholar with my head buried in books – not necessarily for the same reasons as that of an ostrich, though!

On reaching the ‘feeding’ grounds, I saw a portly man with a cap on his head and a spring in his walk, a pair of binoculars dangling round his neck, a small white two-page checklist of birds in his hand and a pencil behind his ears. That is THE MAN, whispered Moorty in my ears! How do you know? I whispered back. Just WATCH him, said Moorty, grinding his teeth! I decided to sidle past several others to draw ‘the man’s’ attention towards me! I had to know. I didn’t believe Moorty blindly - I was a modern woman! I followed him like the rats following the Pied Piper. I was not alone. There were many hanging on to his every word! He would suddenly stop, whisper, point his index finger, and raise his binocs to his eyes! This gesture was followed by a hushed silence in the group. It was as if God had spoken!

Why were people following him like sheep? I had to know! I had managed to reach his side and suddenly the binocs were thrust in my hand and I was asked to look! I didn’t know how to look into a binocs and there were very few around, people were dying to get hold of those binocs which were in my hand! I felt really important. Then the man asked me if I had seen what he wanted me to see and I looked up into a very sweet, smiling face of a man who was trying to teach me how to watch a bird. He asked me to follow him. We walked quietly, softly, and got as close to the bird as possible. At first, my bird brain did not see anything. I saw the Munias for the first time in my life! In North India we call little girls Munias! Taher Saab then asked me to put a tick mark on my wet, white check list. Moorty was very jealous! The great man had talked to me and shown me a bird! I became an early bird and went out for all birding sessions. I was caught - Hooked! An odd bird like me wanted to be one of the birds of the feather!

Hundreds of birdwatchers have been either trained by Taher Saab or come into contact with him. A person of great integrity, a true professional, but above all a person who, through his natural enthusiasm for birds, developed training of potential birdwatchers into a fine art. I am very proud to say that I was one of the privileged birders taught by Taher Saab. Later, as I came to know him better, I noticed he set and demanded high standards. He had many excellent personal qualities. He displayed great warmth, was a caring person, a very kind person, very hospitable, a person who loved company, fun and banter – I can see him in the fields walking a bit slowly, but as enthusiastically as I had seen him on the first day, and pointing at birds, as free as a bird, come rain or sunshine...

Taher Saab, I learnt many things from you. Your passion, dedication, eagerness, child-like enthusiasm... I miss you... why did you have to fly away!

* * *

Siraj Taher

Kevan Bundell & Vasu Reddy

I first met Siraj in 1984. My wife and I were walking in Public Gardens when we spotted a small piece of paper pinned to one of the trees. It was a notice inviting people to contact the Birdwatchers’ Society of Andhra Pradesh. I rang the number at once, and Siraj answered.

Next thing we knew, we were invited to his house to meet him and his family, and soon after that we went out on a Sunday morning field trip. Siraj welcomed us into his birding life as if we were old friends. He was a wonderfully generous and modest man, ready to share his immense knowledge and delightful enthusiasm for birds with everyone. We miss him very much.

* * *

Taher Saab and Me

M Lawrence

I did not have the privilege of meeting Taher Saab. I joined the family of birders only in the year 2012. The first time was on an official BSAP trip to KBR Park, and I had the pleasure of being introduced to the birding family by Mr. Shafaat Ulla. What hit me then was that even in a gathering of people from such diverse backgrounds, age groups, professions and seniority, the hierarchy was (and still is) like a family structure. The only thing common was love for birds and nature. The more experienced members were pointing out birds, and explaining why and how the bird was being identified. Some of them also shared interesting experiences from the past, and that is when I heard, for the first time, the NAME.

I enjoyed the outing, and looked forward to more outings. As the interaction grew, I was guided by the younger and not so young and the seniors; there was this feeling of something being passed on from an era gone by.

Then a few more trips later, during an outing to Cherlapally, the feeling grew stronger - there was this discussion on the peafowl shedding its tail, and, age no bar, everyone had a say – just as, in a family, the wise ones first allow everyone to have their say. Later on, as we were walking back on the bund, I stopped to look at some large cormorants. There was this young man standing beside me, also watching the same birds. He suddenly asked me, “Do you notice anything different?” I replied, “I see a white patch in some of them.” He then explained that I was looking at the juvenile of the species. Later on, I came to know that person better; and when I enquired how he knew so much, prompt came the answer - that he was birding since the age of ten.

Another time, as we were watching birds at Ameenpur, I met Aasheesh. A discussion came up about the Indian Koel’s egg-laying habits; once again, I had a lot of my queries, which Aasheesh patiently answered, and he also got the whole group into the discussion.

Much later, my urge to learn brought me closer to Humayun (the young guru for many of us). Seeing my interest, he suggested that we go for an evening-night-and-early-morning birding trip to Ananthagiri Hills. That day, as we were driving, he talked about some of his experiences of birding in the earlier days, and it always seemed to begin or end with “Baba” and “Sirajsaab” being mentioned with lot of affection and love. I came to know that Humayun’s father taught him birding with a lot of love and passion. But I still did not connect the NAME to “Baba” and “Sirajsaab”. As days went by, the references to the NAME continued, but being shy of my ignorance, I did not ask anyone about it.

Then came our trip to Nagarjunasagar for the AWC. I met one of our senior-most birders, Mr Kulkarni (Kulu or Kulu Uncle, as he is affectionately known), as he was travelling with Humayun and me. Kulu would suddenly start narrating his earlier experiences with “Sirajsaab” and “baba”, and these brief visits to memory lane enlivened the entire trip. At one point, he suddenly said, “*maloom Humayun, mujhe kuchh din pehle Tahersaab khwab me aaye, baba bahut gussa kare bhai*”. That is when the whole puzzle of Tahersaab fell into place!

After the visit, I asked Humayun if he needed help with filling the AWC forms. “Sure,” he said, “let’s get together on a week-end, and I’ll explain how to go about it”. Sitting down at his place made me feel I was at

home - the atmosphere of a birder's home, surrounded by books, hats, pictures and memories of legend! While we were there, Mrs Siraj served us with endless snacks and tea, and I could feel how it must have been when Tahersaab was there.

At some point, I got to see the notepad of Tahersaab. At that moment, looking at that simple notepad, I realized why we were different from many of the other birding groups - "DOCUMENTATION" was the word that struck me. I also realized that the gift of systematic, meticulous work continues with Humayun and Aasheesh. Today, as a family of more than three generations of birders, we are way ahead of others because of the simple pen-pencil-and-paper, on which these priceless records were written and stored.

Today, as we are in the midst of the knowledge era, we mostly record our observations in the form of photographs. I feel if these photos were accompanied by a few words about the weather, surroundings and time, it would enhance their beauty, and also, when shared, could give a complete picture of the species to generations in the future.

While I was not fortunate enough to meet Tahersaab in person, this is one aspect of his legacy that I have seen being practiced by others, and I am sure Tahersaab will inspire all of us in systematically documenting, storing and sharing our observations.

* * *

My memories of Sirajsaab

Umesh Mani

My first memories of Sirajsaab date from my first birding trip, to ICRISAT in early 2006, which he also had come for. At the time, I was a "Sunday-morning-is-too-precious-to-spend-on-anything-other-than-sleeping" type of person, and I did not really understand what all the fuss was about. It was only after I saw people like Sirajsaab and some other senior members, and the passion with which they approached birding, that I too got imbibed with the spirit.

I did not have the opportunity to get to know him well, unfortunately. From what little I saw of Sirajsaab, he could be testy at times, mainly if you didn't do right by the birds, but he was also a gentle soul hidden inside a gruff exterior, and once he sensed that you were pro-birds, the warmth and kindness would unfailingly come to the fore.

The seriousness towards conservation, the absolute love for even the most common birds, the willingness to share freely of his bountiful knowledge and insights – all these were to be seen any time one got to talk with him. I remember one occasion, quite early in my birding avocation, when he had called me over to help with some paperwork, and he ended up spending some 3 hours (!) patiently taking down book after book from his vast library, and explaining interesting aspects from each – and this for a person he barely knew.

But then, he was like that.

* * *

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 7 July 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 26th July 2015: Shamshabad Airport. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 5.30AM.

On the kind invitation of the authorities at Shamshabad Airport, we will be visiting the green environs surrounding the Airport premises for a birding tour, after a long interval of seven years - the last BSAP birding trip to Shamshabad was in 2008. As then, this time too promises to be a fruitful and satisfying outing. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

**INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Mr P Janardhan Reddy on “Antarctica - the White Continent”.
Tuesday, 7th July 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034.** (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

The Talk will include a brief history of the exploration of Antarctica, followed by a photo presentation and a discussion on penguins, seals, whales, landscapes and the impact of climate change on Antarctica.

The speaker Mr P Janardhan Reddy is an avid wild life photographer based in Hyderabad. His interests include environmental issues and wild life.

HISTORICAL BIRDING

Trip Report - Qutb Shahi Tombs, 17th May 2015

Humayun Taher



Indian Peafowl (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

When this trip was first announced, I was extremely pleased to think that this ancient (in more ways than one) venue was once more being recognized. In early days of the BSAP, this was a very popular destination for the fledgling society and its equally juvenile members. The sightings used to be of a high order. Subsequently, much to my disappointment, this place sort of dropped off the radar and, except for occasional visits by the members of the photographic clubs around the city, very little ornithological advancement happened in this area.

Now, the Qutb Shahi Tombs, sometimes erroneously known as the “Seven Tombs” (believe me, there are more than 7 in this complex) are in the process of being ‘restored’ by the Archaeological Society of India; some philanthropic organizations are also facilitating the work. One of our members, who works with these organizations, very kindly obtained permission for us to visit this place, and so the trip was announced.

Since the venue was new to most members, and also very much within the city limits, perhaps it is not really surprising that the turnout was overwhelming, to say the least. This, I think, is certainly one of the few occasions in a long time, when the list of attendees has been quite as long as the list of sightings. Close to 50 members turned out for this trip.

The energetic ministrations of Shafaatsaab and Surekha having got the motley collection of birders into some semblance of order, we trooped into the imperial complex; exclaiming at the beauty and grace of these examples of the architecture of a bygone era. The exquisite carvings in the mud-brick walls of the soaring minarets and domes are as clear-cut as filigree work. The old-time decorators obviously knew their work. While exclaiming over a particularly delicate piece of work adorning a minaret, I found myself plagued with a nagging doubt that the minaret was not quite in sync with its twin - an unsightly bulge on the tip was missing on the one behind. With the sun in our face, we strove to penetrate this mystery of the dissimilar twins and finally the answer was forthcoming... when the sharp eyes of some of our younger members figured out that the bulge was nothing more than a Shikra sitting composedly on the top of the minaret and pretending that it is an old-time ornament. Certainly, the eyes were bright enough to resemble lapis lazuli!

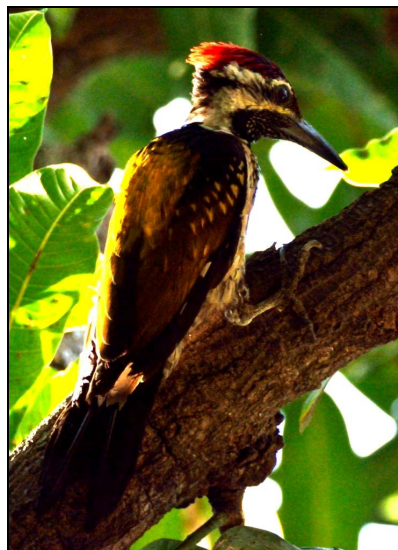
On some of the tombs the ancient plaster is cracking and flaking away. While this is very unfortunate from the point of view of the archaeologist, it has compensations from the ornithologist's point of view. These flaked-away parts are favourite resting places of the little Spotted Owlets that flit all around the complex in the nights. We saw a pair sitting in one of these niches in the flaking walls; periodically one or the other (and occasionally both) would pop their heads out to see if the twitchers were still there or had moved on.. The clown-like antics of Spotted Owlets are most endearing; I never tire of watching them doing their best to hide, but failing dismally through their own all-consuming curiosity, wanting to know exactly what is going on in the world around them.



Pied Bushchat (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

Continuing on our way, some of the members dawdled behind while the rest of the group bustled on ahead. Lagging behind has one advantage - the birds disturbed by the group ahead generally tend to retreat behind the group, so the rearguard has a good opportunity to see these. We saw Copper-smith Barbets calling

from all around us, and a large fig tree in the vicinity was obviously the local club, where all the barbets were gathering for the feast. A solitary Golden-backed Woodpecker (all right... Black-rumped Flameback then..!) perched on a stout tree. It was obviously nesting there, as we saw it poking its head into the hole and tapping away as though smoothing down the roughness of the nest walls. I anticipate interesting developments here in the very near future.



Black-rumped Flameback
(Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

The larger group had, by this time, reached the gardens surrounding the tomb of Muhammed Quli Qutb Shah. This, the largest of the tombs in the imperial complex here, is flanked by large trees, in the top branches of which we saw a male Plum-headed Parakeet and a pair of Red-vented Bulbuls.



Plum-headed Parakeet
(Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

The Parakeet seemed to be in moult, or a juvenile. The rich maroon colour of its head was somewhat faded, and its tail too was not so long or so bright blue; I was inclined to believe that it could be a juvenile bird, probably bred in one of the many nooks and crannies in the crumbling stucco plaster covering the tombs. Certainly both these and the commoner Rose-ringed Parakeet were seen many times, perching on the tops of the tombs and frequently crawling into the holes in the walls and even on the dome itself.



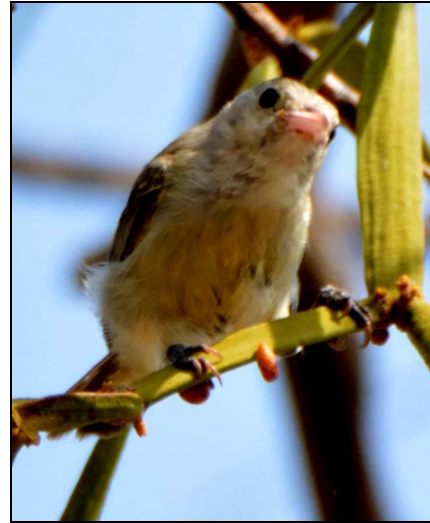
Rose-ringed Parakeet & Black-rumped Flameback
(Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

Grey Francolin and Indian Peafowl are extremely vocal in the mornings. I think once the main group of visitors start to arrive, these shy creatures would quickly disappear into the scrub that is still surviving in some of the areas around the tombs.

But what we all found most interesting is the excellent work being done in the restoration process. Conscious of the delicate filigree work on the tombs, and also of the original construction, the current team of restorers are doing excellent work, using the same mud, lime and straw mix that the ancients used to make the plaster with which the tombs are adorned. The paint too is being carefully selected to protect the monuments. I sincerely hope that these efforts continue and that the ancient imperial complex can once again become a thing of great beauty and serenity.

Musings such as these helped to pass the time. We were now in a small walled garden, with a deep well and some nondescript, unmarked graves scattered about, shaded by many lofty trees. Close by, the restorers have also planted many small saplings of indigenous trees such as neem, acacia and tamarind. We saw several species of woodland birds here, like the White-browed Bulbul, Oriental Magpie Robin, Purple Sunbirds, Pale-billed Flowerpecker and Common Tailorbird. Large Grey Babbler

were vocally indignant at being disturbed in this secluded place just as they were starting their foraging.



Pale-billed Flowerpecker (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)



Rufous Treepie (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

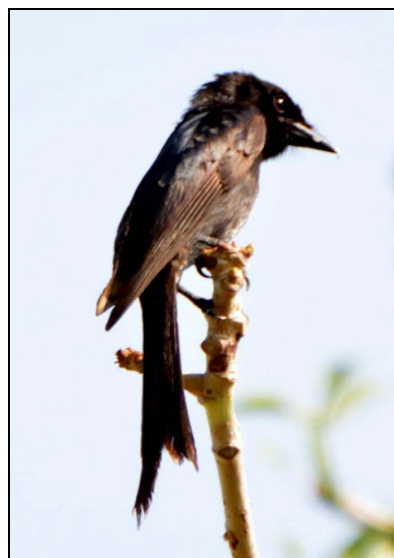
Rufous Treepies and Common Mynas were just as vocal, if slightly less harsh in their strictures. A pair of Dusky Crag Martins skimmed past, so close that the white spots on each feather of their fanned-out tails were clearly visible. Other unseen feathered denizens were twittering all around us, not all identifiable but all equally welcome to the ears. There is music, to those who would listen, in the most prosaic of nature's announcements!



Brahminy Starling (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

But time waits for no one. The day was heating up, and not all the members were accoutured to beat the summer. Accordingly, the return was announced and, pausing only to take a couple of group photographs, with the background, of course, of the beautiful and imposing mausoleum of Sultan Quli Qutb ul Mulk, we retreated to where cold water, hot *chai* and welcome snacks awaited. And with a final tally of 44 species of birds, I had to conclude that this was one occasion where the number of members attending the jamboree considerably exceeded the

number of bird species seen. Not that I could hear any complaints, mind you!



Black Drongo (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

The final list of species sighted is given below:

	Status	Species	Scientific name	Name as per eBird (Common Names translated to English(India))	Common Names - Old (As per Ali & Ripley in Pictorial Guide)
1	R	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	Little Cormorant	<i>Little Cormorant</i>
2	R	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>	Eastern/Western Cattle Egret	<i>Cattle Egret</i>
3	R	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	Glossy Ibis	<i>Glossy Ibis</i>
4	R	Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>	Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Spot-billed Duck</i>
5	R	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Black Kite	<i>Pariah Kite</i>
6	R	Indian Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	Shikra	<i>Shikra</i>
7	R	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	Grey Francolin	<i>Grey Partridge</i>
8	R	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	Indian Peafowl	<i>Common Peafowl</i>
9	R	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Red-wattled Lapwing</i>
10	R	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia intermedia</i>	Rock Pigeon (Blue Rock Pigeon)	<i>Blue Rock Pigeon</i>
11	R	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	Laughing Dove (Little Brown Dove)	<i>Little Brown or Senegal Dove</i>
12	R	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	Spotted Dove	<i>Spotted Dove</i>
13	R	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Rose-ringed Parakeet</i>
14	R	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Blossom-headed Parakeet</i>
15	R	Southern Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	Greater Coucal	<i>Crow-Pheasant or Coucal</i>
16	R	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	Asian Koel	<i>Koel</i>
17	R	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>	Spotted Owlet	<i>Spotted Owlet</i>
18	R	Asian Palm-swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>	Asian Palm-Swift	<i>Palm Swift</i>
19	R	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	Little Swift (Indian House Swift)	<i>House Swift</i>
20	R	White-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>White-breasted Kingfisher</i>
21	R	Little Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	Green Bee-eater	<i>Green Bee-eater</i>
22	R	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Crimson-breasted Barbet, Coppersmith</i>
23	R	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker</i>
24	R	Dusky Crag-martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>	Dusky Crag-Martin	<i>Dusky Crag Martin</i>
25	R,M	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Striated or Red-rumped Swallow</i>
26	R	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Red-vented Bulbul</i>
27	R	White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>	White-browed Bulbul	<i>White-browed Bulbul</i>
28	R	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	Common Iora	<i>Common Iora</i>

29	R	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Magpie-Robin or Dhyal</i>
30	R	Indian Black Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus fulicatus</i>	Indian Robin	<i>Indian Robin</i>
31	R	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata bicolor</i>	Pied Bushchat	<i>Pied Bush Chat</i>
32	R	Large Grey Babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>	Large Grey Babbler	<i>Large Grey Babbler</i>
33	R	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>White-headed Babbler</i>
34	R	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	Ashy Prinia	<i>Ashy Wren-Warbler</i>
35	R	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	Common Tailorbird	<i>Tailor Bird</i>
36	R	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Tickell's Flowerpecker</i>
37	R	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>	Purple Sunbird	<i>Purple Sunbird</i>
38	R	Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>	Indian Silverbill (White-throated Munia)	<i>Common Silverbill or White-throated Munia</i>
39	R	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow	<i>House Sparrow</i>
40	R	Brahminy Starling	<i>Temenuchus pagodarum</i>	Brahminy Starling	<i>Black-headed or Brahminy Myna</i>
41	R	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Common Myna	<i>Common Myna</i>
42	R	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	Black Drongo	<i>Black Drongo or King Crow</i>
43	R	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	Rufous Treepie	<i>Indian Tree Pie</i>
44	R	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	House Crow	<i>House Crow</i>

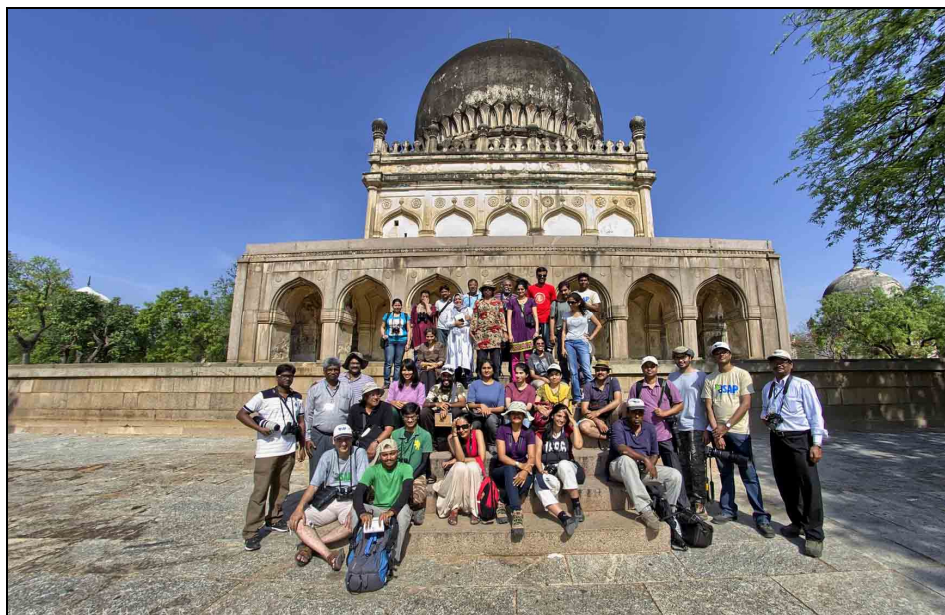


Photo: Hemant Kumar

A SALUTE TO OUR ANCESTOR

Report – Indoor Meeting, 7th April 2015

Surekha Aitabathula

A domineering physique and presence, he looks like an approaching mountain. Powerful shoulders lead to a sloping plank-like back that gives him his signature posture. He knuckle-walks on his massive, hyper-hirsute forelegs, making you say "Ouch! that must hurt." His dome-shaped head adds inches to his height. He has small, deep-set eyes below a protective helmet-like forehead, with constantly-blinking eyelids. A protruding jaw and flared nostrils open to the sky make him look ruthless. A wrinkly face makes him look like an old man. When closed, his mouth is just a slit, but when open wide, trust me, you will get

paralysed with fear. Please welcome centre stage, the magnificent Gorilla.

During our indoor meetings, we have listened to talks on various creatures of the earth, like the Birds, the Dinosaurs, the Tigers, the Fishing Cats, etc, but Gorillas were making an entry, so to speak, for the first time. No wonder then, that about fifty of us descended upon the German Centre to listen to the well-travelled Nikil Rangadas's talk on Gorillas.

The talk was titled 'GORILLAS IN THE MIST', which was originally the title of a book penned by Dian Fossey, who studied Gorillas for over two decades. Fossey's murder at Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda in 1985 remains unsolved till date. The book was later adapted into a movie starring Sigourney Weaver.

We waited with excitement for the curtains to rise on the talk by Nikil Rangadas of the happy disposition and free and spontaneous narration. He kept us engaged right through, and shared several interesting facts and insights about this primate.

Gorilla is the largest living primate, with its DNA quite similar to that of humans (depending on what is counted). The closest relatives of the Gorilla are the intelligent chimp and the super-intelligent human.

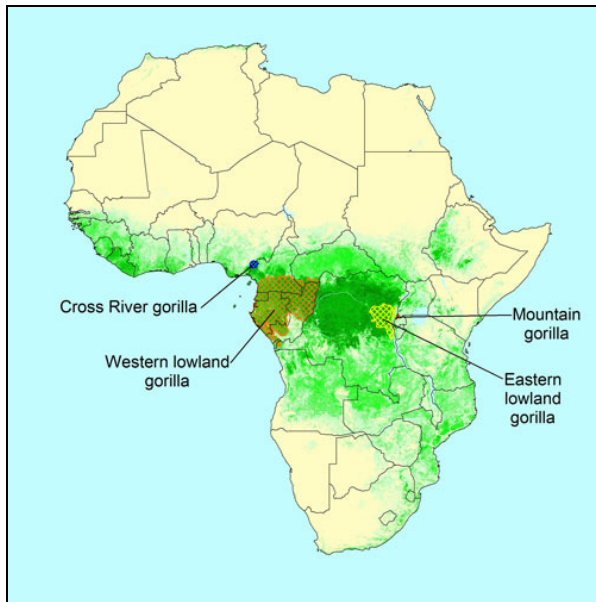


Illustration: courtesy Nikil Rangadas

The Mountain Gorilla inhabits the Albertine Rift Montane cloud forests of Virunga Volcanoes in Rwanda, ranging in altitude from 2200-4300 metres. Lowland Gorillas live in dense forests and lowland swamps and marshes at sea level. Western Lowland Gorillas live in Central West African countries, and Eastern Lowland Gorillas live in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Eastern is darker than the Western, with the Mountain Gorilla being the darkest of all.

Gorillas may walk bipedally when they are carrying food or in defensive situations. An adult male weighs around 180 kg, while the female weighs around 110 kg. The male is up to 5 ft 9 inches

tall, with an arm-span stretching to 8.5 ft. Females have shorter arm-spans.

Adult male Gorillas are known as Silverbacks due to the characteristic silver hair on their backs reaching to their hips. The Gorilla's facial structure is described as *mandibular prognathism*, i.e. the mandible protrudes further out than the maxilla.

Gorillas nest on the ground unlike Chimps and Orangutans.

Vocal communication among gorillas is important in within-group interactions as well as extra-group interactions. Within-group calls include "copulatory grunts" by adults; "whines", "whimpers" and "play chuckles" by infants; "intense" and "mild cough grunts" during mild threat displays; "close" calls that include both "syllabled" and "non-syllabled" calls such as "train-grunts" and "dog whines" (Fossey 1972; Harcourt et al. 1993).

"Close" calls are commonly given within the group, in situations of either potential separation or potential conflict. Extra-group calls serve to alert group members of potential predation and include "barks"; they are also given as long-distance threat displays upon detection of another group, and include the "hoot series," which may be accompanied by chest beating. Most calling occurs within groups during feeding times, though Gorillas do call during rest periods as well.

Nikil's presentation had some really interesting pictures, taken by him in several 'Gorilla countries' in the dark continent. A look at the pictures told us how amazingly similar we are to the Gorillas in our body language - the sitting, the reclining, the stretching, the baby holding, and the grooming behaviour - the only gesture we seemed to have stopped emulating is probably the fiendish chest thumping!

A word about the speaker. A very enthusiastic speaker, Nikil Rangadas kept us enthralled throughout, as he led us on a journey into the lives of Gorillas just as he saw it. His love for the wild shone through loud and clear. He came across as someone full of life, joy and mirth as he walked us through the dos and don'ts to be followed while Gorilla watching. The Q&A session threw up a number of questions, which included such gems like "Why did he run away when the Gorillas chased him?"

Nikil Rangadas retained his conspicuous love for the Gorillas, his knowledge and sense of humour while ably fielding every kind of question, and gave us a thoroughly enjoyable session.

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)



Greater Flamingo Adult (L) and Sub-adult (R) (Pulicat, 27-12-2014)

Order: Phoenicopteriformes

Family: Phoenicopteridae

Genus: *Phoenicopterus*

Species: *P. roseus*

Size: 110-150 cm

Description & distribution: The Greater Flamingo is the largest of the flamingos, averaging 110-150 cm in height, with the tallest recorded individual standing 187 cm tall. It is closely related to the American Flamingo and the Chilean Flamingo, with whom it was earlier considered conspecific. Its plumage is predominantly pinkish-white; the wing coverts are deep reddish-pink, and primary and secondary flight feathers are black. The long, thin neck and legs are pink, eyes are yellow, and the bill is pink with a black tip. Females are smaller than the males. Sub-adult birds are whitish-grey or greyish-brown, with legs and beak mainly brown. They have some pink in the underparts, wings and tail, but attain the proper pink plumage only several years into their adult life. The pink colouration comes from the beta carotene and other beta carotenoid pigments present in the brine shrimp, and the red and blue-green algae, which form a major part of the flamingos' diet.

The Greater Flamingo is distinguished from the Lesser Flamingo by its larger size, paler plumage, lighter bill, and pink (rather than red) legs.

The Greater Flamingo is distributed across Africa, southern Europe, the Middle East, and parts of southern and south-western Asia. Northern populations migrate to warmer regions in winter, and sometimes even stay through the summer.

Behaviour: The Greater Flamingo prefers relatively shallow water bodies, including salt pans, saline lagoons, estuaries, and large saline or alkaline lakes. It uses freshwater inlets for drinking or bathing, but otherwise does not inhabit them.

The diet predominantly consists of brine shrimp, along with insects and their larvae, crustaceans, molluscs, worms, crabs, various microscopic organisms and, sometimes, small fish. They also take plant material, including grass seeds and shoots, decaying leaves, and algae. They feed by stirring up the water with their feet as they walk along slowly, using the tongue to 'pump' water through its specialized bill, which has rows of comb-like plates that filter out the organisms it wants to retain. The upper jaw is movable and not rigidly fixed to the skull, which allows it to feed with its head down.

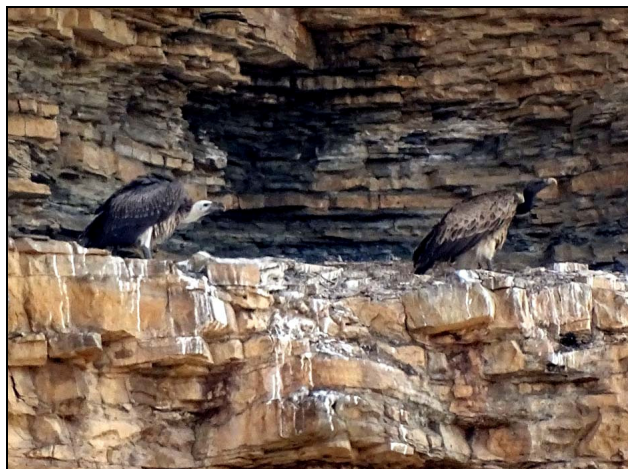
The call is a goose-like, honking *ka-haunk*.

Nesting: The breeding season of the Greater Flamingo varies from place to place, but is usually after the rains. It is a highly social species, nesting in large, dense colonies, often numbering up to 20,000 pairs. The group courtship display is spectacular, and involves synchronised wing-raising, ritualised preening, and 'head-flagging' (raising the neck and beak, and turning the head from side to side). The clutch consists of a single chalky-white egg, which it lays on a mound of hardened mud, or on sandbanks, open beaches, or sandy or rocky islands.

Local name: The Greater Flamingo is known as '*raaj hans*' in Hindi, '*raja hamsa*', '*pu kongra*' or '*samudrapu chiluka*' in Telugu, and '*poonaarai*' or '*kizhi mookku naarai*' in Tamil.

THE RETURN OF THE SCAVENGER

Text: Surekha Aitabathula; Photos: Harpal Singh



Long-billed Vulture juvenile (L) and adult (R)

A story on the sighting of the Long-billed Vulture in Bejjur, written by a reputed senior journalist who just happened to be a classmate of mine from my time at the Department of Journalism in Osmania University, inspired us (Lawrence, Amrutha, Sagarika, Vinay and self) to take off to Adilabad District.

As we drove up, I felt simultaneously sad and proud to learn that the one and only vulture colony in Telangana or Andhra Pradesh, exists in Adilabad District.

How true is the adage that the journey is always more enjoyable (thanks to the anticipatory quotient) than the destination! That said, let me amend the adage a little, and say that the destination this time beat the drive hollow - though the latter was full of laughter, fun and food!

Well, you see, the destination was all the more thrilling, because we got to see the early steps of the return of the scavenger bird, which was almost given up as extinct from our state.

Reaching Mancheriyal at dusk after a fairly long drive, we decided to spend the night there. The next day, before the crack of dawn, we were on our way towards Bejjur. We were met at Sirpur Kagaznagar by our good old friend and classmate, and Special Correspondent with The Hindu based in Adilabad, Harpal Singh - whose car was loaded with fruit baskets for us, large enough to feed half the population of Adilabad!

Together we reached the office of the Forest Range Officer, and were treated to a sumptuous breakfast. The very proactive FRO, Mr M Rammohan Rao's jurisdiction covers Bejjur range. He informed us that he used to notice vultures gliding overhead and thus began tracking them, and chanced upon them nesting on the high cliff next to the Peddavagu stream in the Bejjur forest in 2013. After some initial research, he wrote to the Ministry of Forests and Environment and got research funds sanctioned to set up a small team of young researchers/observers/trackers. This salaried team now observes the vultures daily, keeps bird count, and notes down behaviour and other relevant data.

Mr Rammohan Rao informed us that, with the intention of emulating the successful concept of 'vulture restaurants' in Pinjore, Haryana, he had set up a table on top of the cliff, where he had started leaving large chunks of goat meat for the vultures; however, they were yet to touch the meat till date. When I raised the question of the vultures' reluctance to land or feed on the meat, with some bird experts, I learnt that the cause has remained inconclusive. One school of thought said that the ground-feeding vulture most probably is unable to recognise the meat placed atop the table as food, as it is used to seeing a whole carcass on the ground. Another school of thought was that the vultures in Pinjore and Chamorshi in Maharashtra seemed to comfortably feed on meat placed on a two-feet-high platform. Did the Pinjore vultures adapt, and are the Bejjur vultures taking time to follow suit? We don't know yet. Perhaps the answer lies in regular, keen observation and further research.

Anyway, reaching Bejjur, we trekked towards the cliff, crossed a gurgling stream and reached a high vantage point facing the cliff, from where we could see five chicks sitting outside their respective nests. For two-month-olds, the chicks looked quite tall and well-built. They sat very still, occasionally bending their long, bare necks; at times they looked like bent old men. But they still looked quite beautiful, with greyish-white feathers ruffling in the wind. They were so well-camouflaged on the rocky cliff that they were quite difficult to see. There were several nests, and the best indicator of their presence were the droppings that had whitened the cliff.

Patient they looked, sitting absolutely still for long durations - the vulture is a patient bird! Smilingly I recalled that this was the title of a James Hadley Chase novel I had read as a teenager. It is said that the vulture waits patiently near an injured and dying animal, but does not touch it till it breathes its last - no matter how long it takes. Only then does the vulture move in to scavenge. The vulture does not kill; it just eats the killed.

It is not very difficult to describe the vulture because of its massive size and distinctive shape, thick, bald head and neck, and huge hooked beak that promises to neatly tear every piece of meat off the bone.

In flight, its wingspan looks formidably large - enough to have unsettled and struck fear into the hearts of many an injured and therefore immobile animal.

Sad to note that this powerful creature is also the most vulnerable today, and rapidly dwindling in numbers. The reasons for decline of the vulture are various:

1. Vultures are essentially high perchers, and we have brought down most of our tall trees.
2. The unavailability of carcass - animals that are old and infirm are now taken straight to the slaughterhouse, thereby depriving the vulture of its food.
3. Most vultures are known to lay only a single egg. In the bleak scenario of lack of carcass on the landscape, the parents have to travel very long distances in search of food for the chick. The chick has to be left unguarded and vulnerable for long periods of time, thereby increasing their mortality rate. The vulnerability is all the more because vultures inhabit open country, usually roosting on the cliff or tall trees, or on the ground.
4. Diclofenac is said to be another reason for the declining numbers, and is now banned for veterinary use in India. If diclofenac was the main vulture decimator, then shouldn't the vulture count increase due to the banning of this drug? One wonders.

A clear and present danger, consequent to the disappearance of the vultures, is that rats and wild dogs have taken their place;

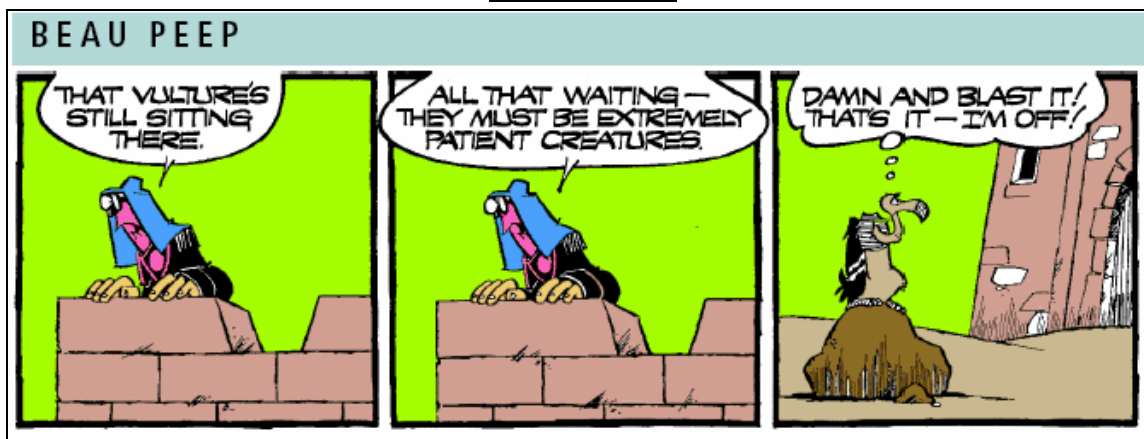
these newly abundant scavengers, however, are not as efficient as vultures. The vulture's metabolism is a true 'dead-end' for pathogens, but dogs and rats become carriers of the pathogens.

We could go on delineating more and more causes and consequences of the decline of vultures, but the need of the hour is to put our best efforts into bringing back the big, the beautiful and the patient scavenger. Thankfully, given various conservation efforts, it is staging a comeback of sorts, and it is to be hoped that they return to abundance soon.



The team with Mr Rammohan Rao, FRO

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 02-04-2014)

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 8 August 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 16th August 2015: Narsapur. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.15AM.

Spanning an area of over 40 km², the Narsapur Reserve Forest is well known for its bird life. The forest is rich in small woodland birds, woodpeckers and flycatchers. Brown Fish Owl, Indian Pitta, White-bellied Drongo etc are some of the interesting sightings during past visits. Narsapur Lake also has the potential of throwing up some surprises. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Dr P C Rao, senior scientist with National Geophysical Research Institute. Tuesday, 17th August 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

The speaker, Dr P C Rao, is an expert on Earthquakes and Tsunamis, and this is a must-attend lecture, as he will speak on various interesting aspects of the subject.

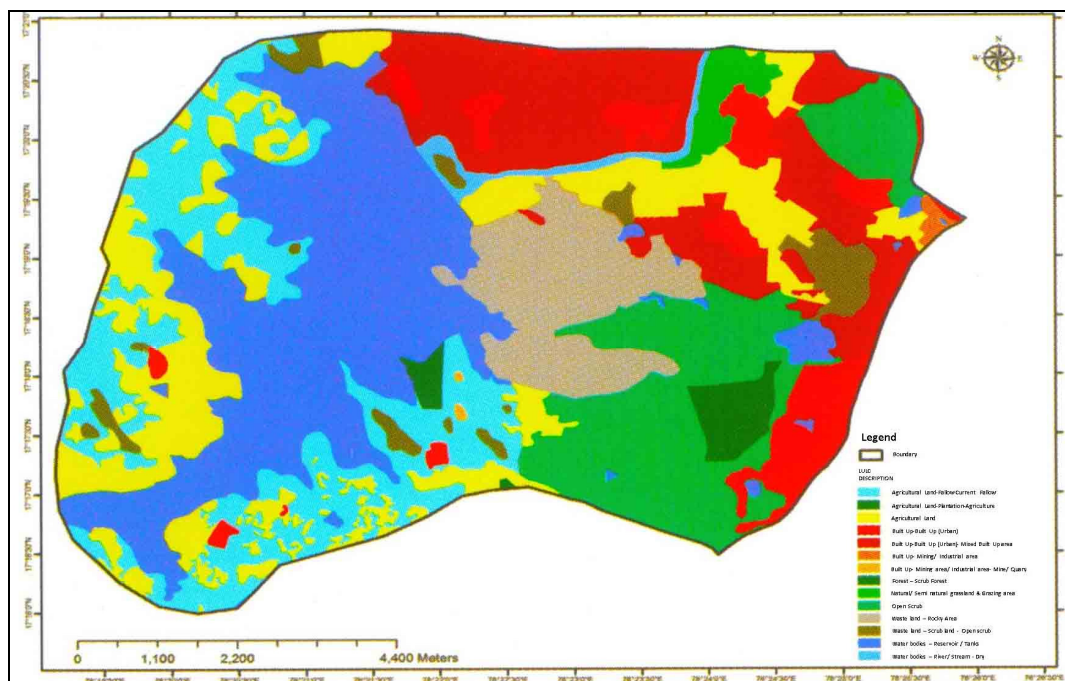
AGRICULTURAL BIRDS OF
PROF. JAYASHANKAR TELANGANA STATE AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY
Raghu Sravan Kumar & MS Ram

Abstract: A total of 54 species of birds were recorded during the survey, among which predominantly recorded were 14 species of insectivorous birds (26%), followed by 11 species of omnivorous birds (20.3%), 9 species each of frugivorous and grainivorous birds (16.66%). The Order Passeriformes recorded were 21 species, followed by Ciconiiformes 5 species, Columbiformes and Cuculiformes with 4 species each. Most of the species recorded were resident breeders (51 sp) followed by local migrants (3 sp). Of the recorded species, predominantly 48 species are common, 5 species are abundant and one species is occasional in occurrence.

Introduction: Agricultural landscapes with the changing seasons, changing scenario and land use patterns, forms a niche for different species of birds. Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, is situated at a distance of 20 Kms away from the main city. The area is a good habitat for many wild animals, birds, reptiles and other common species. According to the information published in the awareness material on "Biodiversity" by All India Network Project on Agricultural Ornithology (AINPAO), at present known as All India Network Project on Vertebrate Pest Management (AINP on VPM), the study area has a floral diversity of 424 species belonging to 252 genera of 64 families, and a total of 412 species of faunal diversity belonging to 43 Orders and 151 families which includes 19 species of Mammals, 172 species of birds, 57 species of Herpetofauna and 164 species of invertebrates (Rao *et al.*, 2013). A similar study carried out by Dr. Ravinder Reddy in 2011 presents a list of 92 species of agriculturally important birds from the cultivation area. An

unpublished data collected in a survey conducted by Ram & Sravan, in the month of March, 2014, on account of Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), listed out 27 species of birds during mid-summer. Swamy *et al.*, (2015) have listed 175 species of birds existing and utilizing the surrounding habitats for gathering food, roosting and nesting. In the present study an attempt has been made to record the avifaunal species of the campus and its surrounding environs.

Study area: Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, formerly a part of Acharya N G Ranga Agricultural University is situated at Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, with geographical co-ordinates 78° 19' 3.277" N and 17° 21' 3.553" E in North-West and 78° 25' 59.64" N and 17° 15' 46.748" E in South-East (Map 1). It contains 7890 hectares of diverse habitats such as open scrub, rocky outcrops, mixed forests, wetlands and agricultural landscapes and is undoubtedly one of the major green lung spaces for the urban population of Hyderabad. Land utilization pattern in the university speaks of agricultural land (30.46%) as the most common followed by natural forests (26.10%), water bodies (24.70%) and urban built-up (19.33%). Of the 30.46% of agricultural land, the university has 53 hectares of students' farm and 113.60 hectares of college farm for conducting research in agriculture apart from interspersed with office buildings, Auditorium, Hostels, Health center, farm houses, green houses, staff quarters, Agro forestry plantations, sports complex and patches of barren land comprising an area of 53.50 hectares and a well-established Agri-Biodiversity Park spread over 200 acres.



Materials & Methods: With the prior permissions from the University administration, we set to conduct field studies in the campus with a group of 30 members. Having gathered at All India Network Project on Vertebrate Pest Management (Formerly All India Network Project on Agricultural Ornithology) by 6:30 AM with all essential equipment - binoculars and cameras, we started recording bird species that we came across. We covered the entire Students' farm and returned back passing through the landmarks from AINP on VPM – Auditorium - Students' farm - administrative block - Home Science department - NCC Parade ground. We later moved on to Agriculture Research Institute (ARI) campus at Rajendranagar, totally covering a distance of 7 Km (Map 2) from 6:30 AM to 11:30 AM. In this study an attempt was made to record the agriculturally important avifaunal composition at agricultural landscape spread out in 2403 ha area (30.46 %) of the

Agricultural University campus, as well the surrounding areas during the early monsoon season for the year.

Results: Avifauna composition of the Agricultural College campus and the ARI farm areas was represented by a total of 54 species belonging to 14 Orders with 32 families. Of the total species, 48 species are common and 5 are abundant in occurrence. Status-wise, 51 species are known as resident breeders, 2 are local migrants and 1 as partial migrant. The most abundant species recorded belong to the order Passeriformes (24 Sp), of which 22 species are common in occurrence and 23 species are resident breeders with local migrant, followed by Ciconiiformes (5 Sp) of which 3 species are common and 2 species are abundant in occurrence and all the 5 species are resident breeders and the other species comprises from the other orders (Table 2).



Since the survey has been conducted in agricultural habitat, it is necessary to classify the birds according to their foraging guild and also along with their IUCN and IWPA status. A total of 14 insectivorous species, followed by 11 omnivorous, 9 frugivorous and grainivorous each, followed by 4 each under carnivorous and piscivorous, and 2 each under nectarivorous and herbivorous

were recorded during the period of survey. All the species are considered as Least Concerned as per IUCN except the Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) which was under Near Threatened category. According to Indian Wildlife Protection Act (1972), 3 species are categorized under Schedule-I and remaining all species are under Schedule-IV (Table 1).

Table 1. Systematic list of birds with their status and abundance at the University campus

Order: Family Scientific Name	Common Name	Foraging guild	IUCN status	IWPA status
Anseriformes: Anatidae				
<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i> (J.R. Forster, 1781)	Spot-billed Duck	Herbivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i> (Horsfield, 1821)	Lesser Whistling-Duck	Herbivorous	Lc	I
Apodiformes: Apodidae				
<i>Cypsiurus balasensis</i> (Gray, JE, 1829)	Asian Palm Swift	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Charadriiformes: Charadriidae				
<i>Vanellus indicus</i> (Boddaert, 1783)	Red-wattled Lapwing	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Ciconiiformes: Ardeidae				
<i>Ardea purpurea</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	Purple Heron	Piscivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Ardeola greyii</i> (F. Boie, 1822)	Indian Pond Heron	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Bubulcus ibis</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Cattle Egret	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Threskiornithidae				
<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i> (Temminck, 1824)	Black Ibis	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i> (Latham, 1790)	Oriental White Ibis	Piscivorous	NT	IV
Columbiformes: Columbidae				
<i>Columba livia</i> (Gmelin, 1789)	Blue Rock Pigeon	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i> (Scopoli, 1786)	Spotted Dove	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> (Frivaldszky, 1838)	Eurasian Collared Dove	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i> (Blyth, 1842)	Little Brown Dove	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Coraciiformes: Cerylidae				
<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i> (Shaw, 1786)	Indian Grey Hornbill	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Halcyonidae				
<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	White-throated Kingfisher	Piscivorous	Lc	IV
Meropidae				
<i>Merops orientalis</i> (Latham, 1801)	Small Green Bee-eater	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Cuculiformes: Cuculidae				
<i>Centropus sinensis</i> (Stephens, 1815)	Greater Coucal	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Clamator jacobinus</i> (Boddaert, 1783)	Pied Crested Cuckoo	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Asian Koel	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Hierococcyx varius</i> (Vahl, 1797)	Common Hawk Cuckoo	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Falconiformes: Accipitridae				
<i>Accipiter badius</i> (Gmelin, 1788)	Shikra	Carnivorous	Lc	I
<i>Elanus axillaris</i> (Latham, 1802)	Black-shouldered Kite	Carnivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Milvus migrans</i> (Boddaert, 1783)	Black Kite	Carnivorous	Lc	IV
Galliformes: Phasianidae				
<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i> (Gmelin, 1789)	Grey Francolin	Grainivorous	Lc	IV

<i>Pavo cristatus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Indian Peafowl	Omnivorous	Lc	I
Gruiformes: Rallidae				
<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i> (Pennant, 1769)	White-breasted Waterhen	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Porphyrio porphyria</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Purple Swampphen	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Passeriformes: Alaudidae				
<i>Mirafra cantillans</i> (Blyth, 1845)	Singing Bushlark	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Cisticolidae				
<i>Prinia inornata</i> (Sykes, 1832)	Plain Prinia	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Prinia socialis</i> (Sykes, 1832)	Ashy Prinia	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Compephagidae				
<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	Small Minivet	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Corvidae				
<i>Corvus culminatus</i> Sykes, 1832	Jungle Crow	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Corvus splendens</i> (Vieillot, 1817)	House Crow	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i> (Latham, 1790)	Rufous Treepie	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Dicaeidae				
<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i> (Latham, 1790)	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	Nectarivorous	Lc	IV
Dicruridae				
<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i> (Vieillot, 1817)	Black Drongo	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Estrildidae				
<i>Lonchura malabarica</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Indian Silverbill	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Lonchura punctulata</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Scaly-breasted Munia	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Leiothrichidae				
<i>Dinopium benghalense</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Black-rumped Flameback (Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker)	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Muscicapidae				
<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i> (Blyth, 1843)	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Saxicola caprata</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	Pied Bushchat	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Saxicola torquatus</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	Common Stonechat (Siberian Stonechat)	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus</i> (Linnaeus, 1776)	Indian Robin	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Nectariniidae				
<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	Purple-rumped Sunbird	Nectarivorous	Lc	IV
Oriolidae				
<i>Oriolus oriolus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Eurasian Golden Oriole	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Passeridae				
<i>Passer domesticus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	House Sparrow	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Plocidae				
<i>Ploceus philippinus</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	Baya Weaver	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Pycnonotidae				
<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	Red-vented Bulbul	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i> (Lesson, 1841)	White-browed Bulbul	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Sturnidae				
<i>Acridotheres tristis</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	Common Myna	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Timaliidae				
<i>Turdoides affinis</i> (Jerdon, 1845)	Yellow-billed Babbler	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Megalaimidae				

<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i> (Latham, 1788)	Coppersmith Barbet	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Psittacidae				
<i>Psittacula krameri</i> (Scopoli, 1769)	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Strigidae				
<i>Athene brama</i> (Temminck, 1821)	Spotted Owlet	Carnivorous	Lc	IV

IUCN= International Union for Conservation of Nature; Lc =Least concerned; NT= Near threatened; IOWPA= Indian Wildlife Protection Act; I& IV - Schedule-I, Schedule-IV

Table 2. Status of birds recorded at Agricultural University Campus, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad

S. No	ORDER	Fa	Gen	Sp	OCCURRENCE			STATUS		
					Com	Abu	Occa	Res	Bre	LM
1	Anseriformes	1	2	2	1	1		2	2	
2	Apodiformes	1	1	1	1			1	1	
3	Charadriiformes	1	1	1	1			1	1	
4	Ciconiiformes	2	5	5	3	2		5	5	
5	Columbiformes	1	2	4	4			4	4	
6	Coraciiformes	3	3	3	3			3	3	
7	Cuculiformes	1	4	4	4			3	3	2
8	Falconiformes	1	3	3	3			3	3	
9	Galliformes	1	2	2	2			2	2	
10	Gruiformes	1	2	2	1	1		1	1	
11	Passeriformes	16	19	24	22	1	1	23	23	1
12	Piciformes	1	1	1	1			1	1	
13	Psittaciformes	1	1	1	1			1	1	
14	Strigiformes	1	1	1	1			1	1	
Total	14	32	47	54	48	5	1	51	51	3

Fa= Family, Gen= Genus, Sp= Species, Com= Common, Abu= Abundant, Occa= Occasional, Res= Resident, Bre= Breeding and LM= Local migrant.

Bird of the day

“Shikra” was the bird of the day, as a juvenile Shikra was mistaken for a Besra. This made us realize the importance of keen observations, which are necessary for correct identification.

Acknowledgement

We are very thankful to the authorities of PJTS Agricultural University for permitting us to conduct the survey. We are also grateful to the Head, AINP on VPM for sparing their staff and being with us throughout the survey.

References

1. V. Ravinder Reddy. “Abundance of common birds at Rajendranagar, Hyderabad”, Palani Paramount Publications. *J. Ecotoxicol. Environ. Monit.* 21 (6) 577-589 (2011).
2. V. Vasudeva Rao, S. J. Rahman, V. Hanumantha Rao, G. Surender, A.V. L. N. R. Rao, A. Baleeshwar Reddy, B. Laxmi Narayana and P. Venkateshwarlu. “Bio-diversity at ANGRAU and Surrounding Environs”, *Publicity material- A source of information*. All India Network Project on Agricultural ornithology, ANGRAU, Rajendranagar, Hyd - 30 (Jan, 2013).
3. K. Swamy, A. Baleeshwar Reddy, V. Hanumanth Rao, G. Surender, B. Laxminarayana, R. Sravankumar, B. Naresh and V. Vasudeva Rao. “Bio-diversity at Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University (Formerly part of Acharya N G Ranga Agricultural University) and surrounding environments”, (Abstract published) Natural resources & Animal husbandry - International conference on Bio-resources and Stress management.

ANTARCTICA

COLDEST DRIEST AND MOST MAGNIFICENT

Report – Indoor Meeting, 7th July 2015

Text: Surekha Aitabathula; Photos: P Janardhan Reddy

Antarctica is the earth's southernmost continent containing the geographic South Pole. It is situated in the Antarctic region of the southern hemisphere, almost entirely south of the Antarctic Circle.

The Antarctic is visited by more than 40,000 tourists annually, the most popular destination being the Antarctic Peninsula area, especially the South Shetland and South Georgia Islands.

One such visitor was our speaker, Janardhan Reddy. He kept the audience enthralled with his narration and his wonderful pictures of the cold and beautiful wilderness.

With a surface area of 14 million square kilometers, South Georgia was the first island of the Antarctic discovered by Anthony De La Roche in 1675. The region had no indigenous population when first discovered and its present inhabitants comprise a few thousand transient scientific and other personnel working at the several dozen research stations maintained by various countries.

The Indian Antarctic Program is a multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional program under the control of the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India. It was initiated in 1981 with the first Indian expedition to Antarctica. The program gained global acceptance with India's signing of the Antarctic Treaty and subsequent

construction of the Dakshin Gangotri Antarctic Research base in 1983.

Some interesting facts about the Antarctic:

- * Nobody owns it. It remains free of government and ownership. In 1959 the Antarctic Treaty was drafted designating the land as “a natural reserve devoted to peace and science”.

- * It is the only continent without a time zone.

- * Antarctica is the coldest place on earth - the coldest temperature ever recorded was an unbelievable -89.6 Degrees Centigrade! - and there is good reason to hope that it remains so, because if global warming would cause its ice sheets to melt, then ocean levels across the world would rise 200 feet!

- * There are no permanent residents here.

Coming to the creatures that dare to inhabit this punishing ‘freezer’ environment - these are the Penguins, Whales, Seals, Krill, Albatross, etc. The largest of the penguins, the Emperor Penguin, breeds here.

Janardhan Reddy spoke at length about his fantastic Antarctic experience, and the ensuing discussion threw up a whole lot of questions. It seemed to me that several members of the audience were tempted to make travel plans to the Antarctic!

Some photos from Janardhan Reddy’s trip:



Emperor Penguin & Adelie Penguins



Crab-eater Seal



Blue-eyed Shags



Chinstrap Dolphins



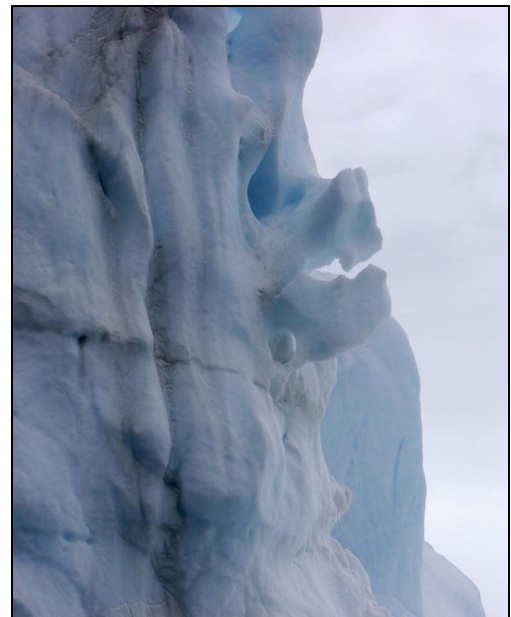
Kelp Seagull



Humpback Whale with baby



Ice Form



Ice Form

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Bank Myna (*Acridotheres ginginianus*)



Bank Myna (near Sattal, 17-04-2015)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Sturnidae
Genus: *Acridotheres*
Species: *A. ginginianus*
Size: 23 cm

Description & distribution: The Bank Myna is a South Asian myna that is smaller than the Common Myna, and has a somewhat similar general colour scheme. The head is black, neck and mantle are slaty grey, and wing coverts are black, while the underparts are lighter grey with some pinkish plumage towards the centre of the abdomen. It has a pink wing patch near the base of the primaries which is not always seen. The tail is black, with the outer tail feathers having pale pinkish-buff tips. Legs are yellow, while the bill and a prominent bare patch behind the eyes are bright orange-red. Irises are deep red. The Bank Myna may also show a tuft of feathers at the base of the upper mandible, reminiscent of the Jungle Myna. The sexes are similar, but younger birds have a browner head and neck.

The Bank Myna is more or less restricted to the Indian sub-continent, being found from the Indus Valley eastwards across the Gangetic plains and south of the lower Himalayan foothills. Of late, more sightings are being reported from southern India, though it was earlier considered to be absent. There are also reports of flocks in Japan, Taiwan and the Maldives, while it is an introduced bird in Kuwait. Generally resident, it may undertake movements in response to changes in weather and food conditions.

Habitat & behaviour: The Bank Myna is gregarious - it forages in flocks, breeds colonially, and roosts in large groups on trees. Usually found near open water, its usual habitat is cultivated farmland and open country, although flocks are often seen in markets, railway stations, gardens and parks inside cities within its range. A very vocal bird, it uses a wide range of calls - croaks, clucks, whistles, screeches and song elements - quite like the Common Myna, although softer. The diet mainly consists of grain, fruit and insects, but it may pick up scraps in road-side restaurants and dumpyards, and is even known to follow catering vehicles in airports. It may also, like the Common Myna, perch on livestock or follow grazing animals to pick up disturbed insects.

Nesting: The Bank Myna breeds from April to August. Its common name has, in fact, originated from its practice of nesting almost exclusively in holes excavated in moist earthen river banks, embankments or walls of open wells, although it may occasionally use holes in brick walls. Excavated holes may be up to 7 feet deep. Nests are lined with grass, leaves, feathers and even snake slough. The usual clutch consists of 4-5 pale sky-blue or greenish-blue eggs, and two broods may be raised in a season.

Local name: The Bank Myna is known as '*ganga myna*' in Hindi and Marathi, '*ganga gutar*' in Punjabi and '*ganga saarika*' in Sanskrit. Vernacular names in South Indian languages don't seem to be well-known, possibly because its range has only recently started expanding southwards.

SIGHTING OF DESERT WHEATEAR IN HYDERABAD

Text and photo: Supreet Sahoo

On a chilly winter morning in Hyderabad, I was preparing for my morning rounds to Ameenpur when I said to myself, "Today will be special". But then again, isn't that what all bird photographers think to themselves before they start their day!

The destination was one of the most popular birding locations of Hyderabad, Ameenpur Lake, but the motive was ambitious - to find and photograph the most uncommon of birds. Perhaps this is what has motivated me to travel distant lands in the past. The quest continues.

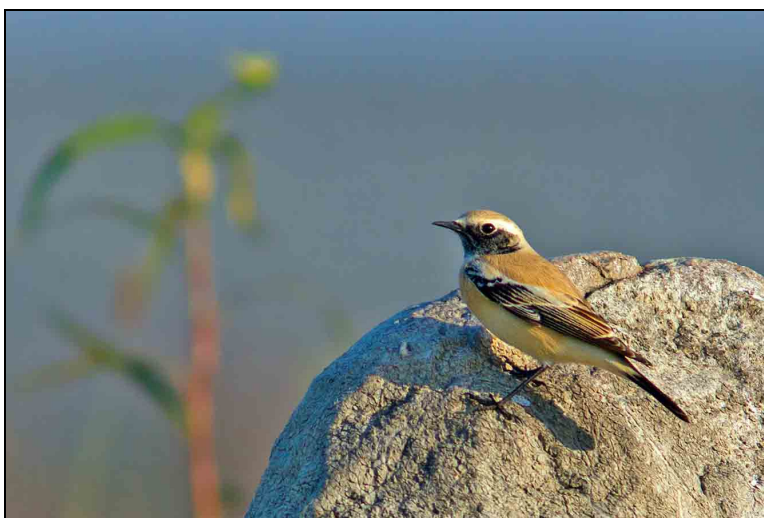
As soon as we reached Ameenpur, I started scouring the location for the usual suspects - Pratincoles, Herons, Sandpipers, etc. While I was photographing a Kingfisher, an unusual, petite bird

flew across in front of my camera and from the corner of my eye I could tell that this one was different. It was sunny and it took a bit of time to find this bird.

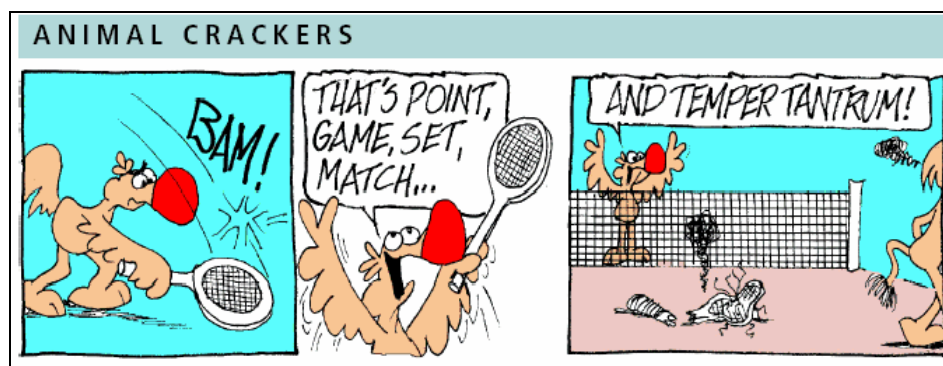
As soon as I saw it I knew that it was different, yet something I had noticed in the past.

A Desert Wheatear! In Hyderabad! How is that even possible? I took down some notes and Googled to learn more about past sightings and found an article by Ashwin Naidu which gave more details about previous sightings.

A happy start to the day, indeed!



Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 01-05-2014)

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 9 September 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 13th September 2015: Geological Survey of India Campus, near Bandlaguda village. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

The GSI Southern Region campus is a vast area with a large number of different plants and trees, and has a fairly varied bird life. There is also a museum which would be kept open specially for us, which will be well worth seeing. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Diyanat Ali, Founder President, Great Hyderabad Adventure Club, on "Life Lessons by Nature".

Monday, 7th September 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

The speaker, Diyanat Ali, is an adventurer, entrepreneur and a nature lover. A certified Outbound and Experiential Learning Facilitator, he will speak on the lessons humans can learn from nature. Whether growing a garden, spending time with a dog or taking a stroll in a park, looking at the stars, listening to bird calls or just opening your windows to let the fresh air in, there is an opportunity to constantly reflect and learn from nature. Diyanat will elaborate on various aspects of this interesting subject.

LADAKH TRAVELS

Text and photos: Vikramdev Rao



Leh Valley Panorama

Umesh's request to write a piece for the Pitta was prompted by my photo of the Black-necked Crane taken during my recent trip to Ladakh. Not being an avid birder I was initially reluctant as my trip was primarily a photography tour focusing on landscapes and monasteries. Two members of our group were keen on birds so I wasn't totally away from that aspect, but this is going to be more of a travelogue rather than a birdwatching trip report.

Our journey started in Srinagar, the troubled city in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Srinagar is dominated by the Dal Lake which is the centerpiece of this beautiful region. While the lake photographs well and all the houseboats and shikaras make for photogenic subjects, the lake is generally dirty and crowded, being the primary recipient of all the sewage and discharge from the hundreds of houseboats that populate the lake.

From Srinagar we drove to Kargil where we stayed the night in a tented camp a few kilometers away from the town. En route we drove through Sonmarg which was packed with pilgrims on their annual pilgrimage to Amarnath. As we drove towards the Zoji La ('La' means 'Pass') to Kargil, we could see the vast tented base camp for the pilgrims down in the valley. A few days into our trip, we heard that there were heavy rains in this area resulting in the pilgrimage being cancelled, making me wonder how they evacuated this huge tented camp.

As we approached Zoji La, the terrain of the Himalayas became evident and the dangerous nature of the structure was apparent. No wonder they continually have landslides and huge boulders rolling down and wiping out large sections of the road. Credit must go to the Border Roads Organisation who is constantly at work repairing, rebuilding and maintaining these fragile roads in order to keep the lines of communication open.

We passed Drass which was the scene of the most intense fighting during the Kargil war, to the NunKun tented camp where we spent the night. The next day we resumed our journey to Leh. On the way we stopped at Mulbeck, the site of Maitreya, a statue of the Buddha carved in stone, and then on to Lamaryu, one of the largest Buddhist monasteries in Ladakh. The terrain in this area is unusual and, over the years, has eroded in such a way that it is referred to as 'Moonland'. We reached Leh in the evening and checked into our hotel, the "Mahey Retreat".



Lamaryu Monastery

Visitors are advised to spend time acclimatizing, as altitude sickness can be quite a problem. So, the next day was spent in visiting monasteries in and around Leh so that we could get acclimatized to the altitude of 11,000 ft. We visited Siptuk, Shey, Leh palace and the Shanti Stupa.



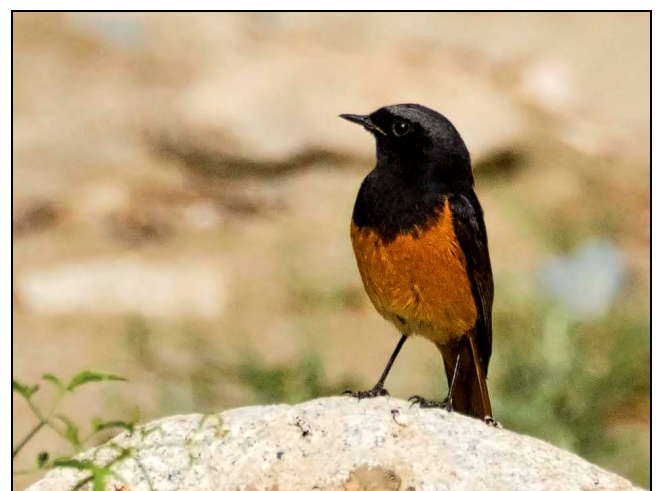
Entrance to the former Leh Palace



Shanti Stupa

On the following day we drove to Nubra Valley over the Kardong La which, at 18500ft, is the highest motorable pass in the world. We drove down to Diskit which is at the same altitude as Leh. We passed the sand dunes of Nubra on our way to the Edelweiss tented camp where we stayed the night.

Next morning we spent time taking photographs of birds found on the camp site. I was only able to get some shots of a pair of Black Redstarts (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), but got to see the Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*), Yellow-billed Chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*), Red-billed Chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) and White-capped Water Redstart (Male) (*Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*). Identification of all these birds was possible because two of our group were keen birders.



Black Redstart (male)



Black Redstart (female)

After breakfast we went to the sand dunes where riding the Bactrian (double-humped) camels is a great attraction for tourists. We didn't go for a ride but spent our time taking photographs. We got one of the camel herders to bring his camel away from the crowds so that we could take photographs without having the background disrupted. After a visit to the monastery we headed back to Leh but little did we realize what we were in for.

On the way up to Kardong La we got stuck in a traffic jam due to unseasonal rains which resulted in the mountain streams flowing over the road. It took us almost three hours, instead of the planned hour, to reach Kardong La. Once we passed Kardong La I thought the worst was over and we would be in Leh in quick time, but it was not to be.

Just a few hundred meters past Kardong La we came to a standstill. On enquiry we were told that the rains had resulted in a collapse of the road in two places and no one had an idea of how long it would take. It was raining constantly and this must have hampered the work. We were stuck in our vehicles for hours! We finally got in to Leh at 10:30 pm, stiff and tired, having spent more than 8 hours in the vehicles without even an opportunity to get out and stretch. There must have been at least 600 vehicles stranded because of the damaged road. Quite an experience!

The night's experience didn't slow us down, though - off we were at 7:30 am on our way to Pangong Tso, a lake shared by India and China. Fortunately the rain had stopped, although it was overcast and didn't make for good photography.

From the Chang La at an altitude of 17600 ft, we descended to Pangong Tso. The landscapes of multitudinous colours were a treat and made for great photo opportunities. The bare mountains of ochre, magenta, brown and black with the valleys of green and yellow, constantly changing as we progressed, were truly awe-inspiring.



Bactrian Camels in Nubra Valley

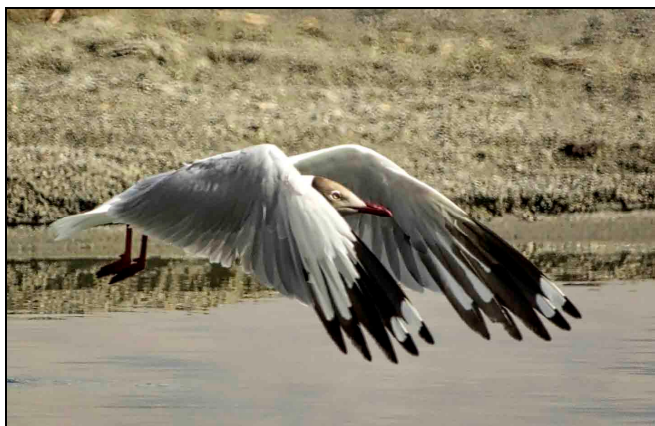


Bactrian Camel



Pangong Tso

Then we arrived at Pangong Tso, a huge stretch of blues and greens amongst the colours of the surrounding mountains. Truly a sight to be seen! As we drove alongside the lake towards the hotel, we saw Brown-headed Gulls (*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*), Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*) and Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*). After checking in, we went back to the shores of the lake for a photo session which included shots of birds along with landscapes. Towards the late evening we took some time-lapse sequences which showed the waning light with the clouds moving across the skies in a movie format. We came back again after dark, in the cold, to try and take photos of the night sky, but to our bad luck the sky clouded over and dashed all hopes of this.



Brown-headed Gull

Early next morning we were back taking photos before the breeze picked up and got some great shots of the reflections of the mountains on the lake. The aforementioned birds were also around and we managed to get some flight shots. As the sun rose higher we took off for our return journey to Leh. En route we came across some Himalayan Marmots and spent almost an hour taking photographs.



Himalayan Marmot

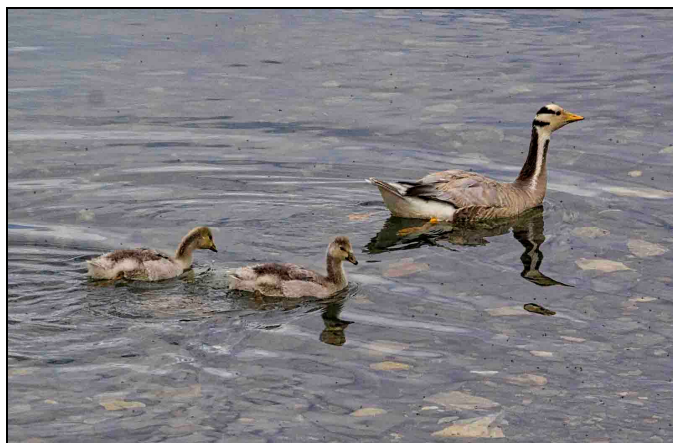
Because of the improved road conditions the number of tourists are increasing and they stop and try to attract the Marmots with food. As they have no fear of humans they come readily to take the biscuits and chocolates offered and in time to come will depend on handouts – an example of how improved accessibility is threatening our wild life.



Tso Moriri

Next day we were off on a two-night trip to Tso Moriri and Tso Kar. The roads were not as bad as those to Nubra and Pangong, but the journey was long. As usual we stopped en route for photo sessions since there were great opportunities for photographing landscapes. At Tso Moriri we stayed at the Yak tented camp. Though it was windy and cold outside it was quite comfortable in the tents. The evening was spent taking photos although we were interrupted by a sudden downpour which had us scuttling back into our vehicles and back to the tents. After dinner (all our meals were generally vegetarian although in some places we were able to get non-veg) someone announced that the sky was clear and the stars were out. So we got back into our vehicles to get away from habitation, so that we could take photos of star trails and night skies. Bundled up against the cold, we managed to get some shots but in a short while the clouds moved in and that was the end of our attempt to photograph the stars.

The next morning was spent trying to take photos of water birds but because of the open nature of the terrain, they would see us well in advance, and would move away from the shores as we approached. We tried to hide behind rocks and boulders where we could find them but were generally unsuccessful. We saw a whole lot of Bar-headed Geese feeding on insects in the water.



Bar-headed Goose with chicks



Tso Kar

Mid-morning, we left for Tso Kar which we reached in the early evening. The lake was almost totally dry, which was a bit of a disappointment, but as we approached we saw a pair of Black-necked Cranes (*Grus nigricollis*). Armed with our long lenses and tripods we set out to take photographs of these elusive birds. We couldn't get too close because the terrain was slushy, but we were happy to take photographs of a rare species. Ruddy Shelducks were also visible.



Black-necked Crane

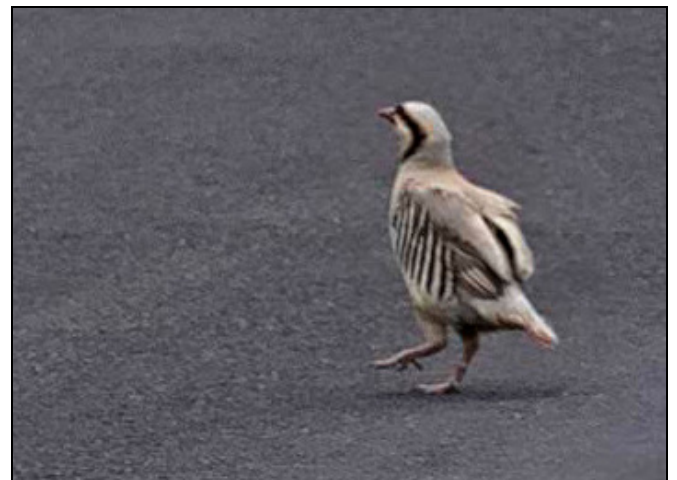
The following morning started out as a dull and cloudy day but as it progressed, the sky cleared a bit and we were witness to beautiful cloud formations and great landscapes. The cranes and ducks were still around and we managed to take some photos but

they were too far and the photos were more in the nature of record shots. The brilliant skies and colourful mountains more than made up for the disappointment in spotting and photographing birds.



Himalayan Wild Ass

We drove back to Leh for the last night of the trip. On the way we saw some Himalayan Wild Asses which seemed very similar to the Wild Asses seen on the Rann of Kutch. We stopped at the Thiksey monastery but just before we got there we came across a Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*) which scooted across the road. Out came our cameras and though I managed to get a couple of shots, they were not clear as the bird was running and it was difficult to focus.

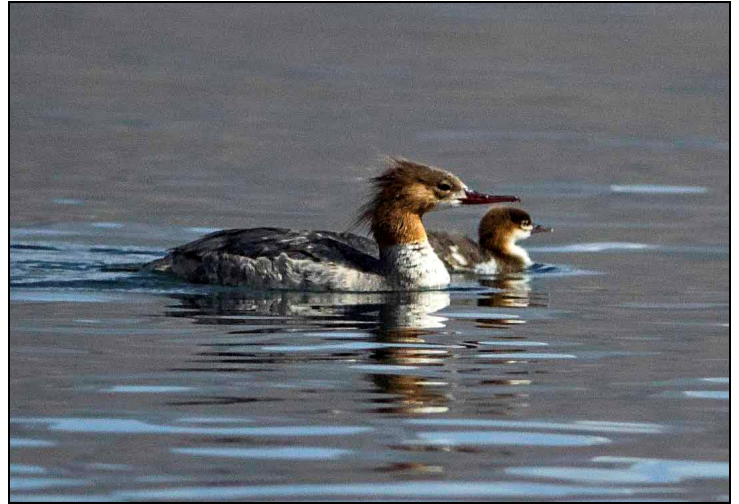


Chukar

We had a comfortable night even though the electricity was playing hide and seek. The next day we were off to Hyderabad via Delhi.

Given below is a list of birds seen:

Common Hoopoe
Black-billed Magpie
Yellow-billed Chough
Red-billed Chough
Black Redstart
White-capped Water Redstart
Bar-headed Goose
Common Merganser
Ruddy Shelduck
White Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Citrine Wagtail
Himalayan Buzzard
Common Rosefinch
Eurasian Hobby
Chukar
Black-necked Crane
Brown-headed Gull
Desert Wheatear

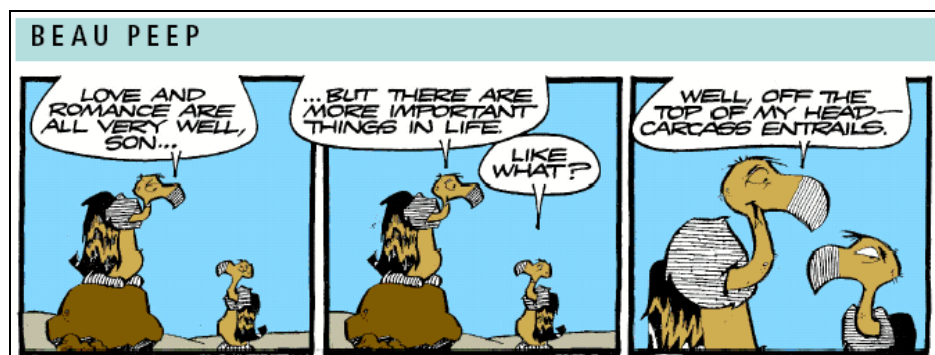


Common Merganser with chick



Local inhabitants in traditional attire

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 01-05-2014)

The Story of the Grey-bellied Cuckoo

Text and photos: Yella Prakash Rao

Swarnandhra Colony at Yapral, a few km from Sainikpuri, is witness to a special natural phenomenon of Brood Parasitism. We all have heard of the Koel/Cuckoo laying eggs in the crow's nest and the crow, subsequently, raising the chicks of the Koel. This is what Brood Parasitism all about. However, the actors in this story are a little different. They are the Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerines*) and the Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*).

The Cuckoo mother has once again tricked the Ashy Prinia into rearing its young, a job both have perfected over a very long time. The author is witness to this special phenomenon for the fifth consecutive year (2011-2015) within the colony. The phenomenon of feeding, which is the most conspicuous activity of Brood Parasitism, was noticed mainly in the months of August through October.

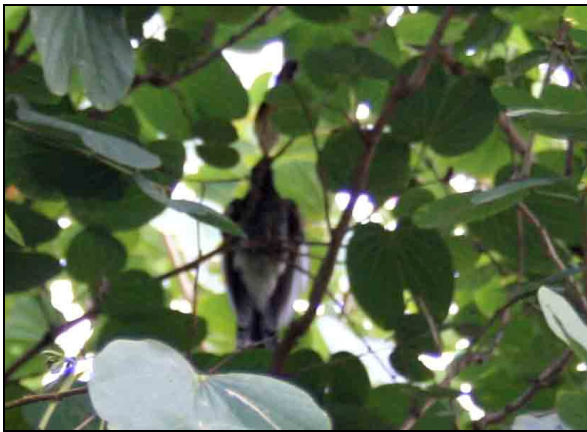
The chick makes a distinct call..... *Tssh.. Tssh.. Tssh.. Tssh..* and the Prinia (foster parent) makes its distinctive call.....

TeTeeiii... TeTeeiii... while foraging. The cuckoo chick makes a cacophony of screeching sounds while being fed and at the end, the foster mother is pecked or shoed away to bring in more!

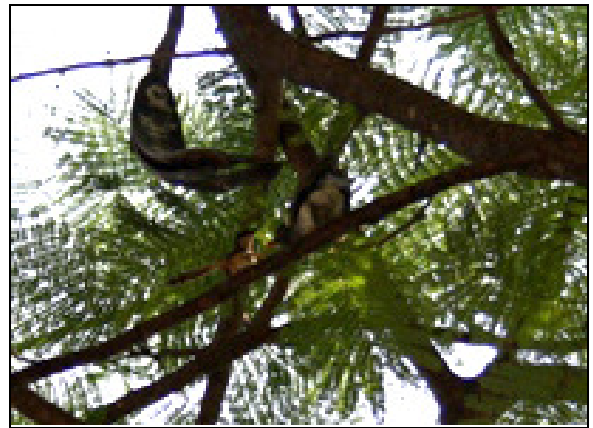
The chick which is a shy bird is often seen shifting from perch to perch, while the foster parent keeps track of the chick's position. This feeding process was noticed for a period of three days at a stretch. An adult Cuckoo was also seen in the vicinity on majority of the occasions, singing and trying to chase off the chick.

In October 2014, an Ashy Prinia's nest that was colonized by a Cuckoo was discovered in the Colony. However, the same fell victim to an attack by a Coucal.

A HD video of the feeding activity (of nearly 2 minutes' duration) is available for interested birders/researchers.



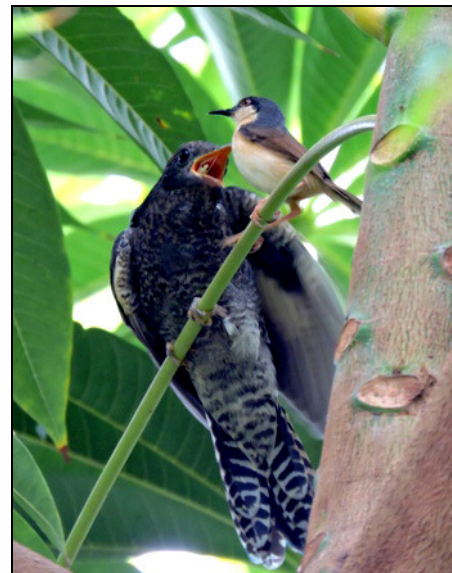
**Ashy Prinia feeding Grey-Bellied Cuckoo chick
(Sep 2011)**



**Ashy Prinia feeding Grey-bellied Cuckoo chick
(Oct 2012)**



**Grey-bellied Cuckoo eggs in Ashy Prinia nest
(Oct 2014)**



**Ashy Prinia feeding Grey-bellied Cuckoo chick
(Aug 2015)**

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Blue-tailed Bee-eater (*Merops philippinus*)



Blue-tailed Bee-eater Adult (L) and Juvenile (R) (Chennai, 27-09-2015)

Order: Coraciiformes

Family: Meropidae

Genus: *Merops*

Species: *M. philippinus*

Size: 23-26 cm

Description & distribution: The Blue-tailed Bee-eater is a near-passerine member of the Meropidae family of bee-eaters. Like other bee-eaters, it is slender and richly coloured. The upperparts and underparts are mainly green, with a blue and brown wash, while the face has a black eye stripe with a narrow blue streak alongside, and the throat is yellow morphing into chestnut; this chestnut also extends to the ear-coverts. The forehead and crown are mainly green, with a touch of blue on the supercilium and above the black bill. The tail is blue with two elongated central tail feathers; rump and undertail-coverts are also blue. The sexes are alike. The juvenile lacks the elongated tail feathers, and the throat is more rufous than chestnut.

The Blue-tailed Bee-eater is distributed across north Pakistan; north, central and north-eastern parts of India; Nepal; Myanmar; south-eastern China; Philippines; and south to Sulawesi, Flores and Eastern Guinea. It is a local migrant, wintering further south in peninsular India, Sri Lanka, Malay Peninsula and Greater Sundas.

Habitat & behaviour: The Blue-tailed Bee-eater is usually seen in small groups, in sub-tropical open country, including parks, farmlands, paddy-fields, and scrub areas. It prefers to stay near

large water-bodies, though it may also be seen near village ponds, tanks or lakes.

Its call is a *te-tew?*, *te-tew?*, somewhat reminiscent of the call of a Red-vented Bulbul, and it may also use a bi-syllabic *pr-reee*, *pr-reee*. The diet consists mainly of insects like bees, dragonflies, wasps and hornets, which it catches on the wing by sallying from open perches. It may also take butterflies, ants, beetles, bugs, grasshoppers and other ground insects. It hits the insect against the perch to kill it and break the exoskeleton before consuming it.

Nesting: The Blue-tailed Bee-eater breeds from March to June. It is a gregarious bird and nests colonially in groups of 5-20 pairs, though occasionally the groups may be larger. It nests in river-banks, sandy mounds, beach dunes or open flat areas like lawns, sometimes along with Bank Mynas. The nest is an unlined chamber at the end of a tunnel which is usually around 7cm across and 1-3m deep. Both parents share nest-excavation, incubation and feeding duties. The usual clutch consists of 3-6 white eggs, and older siblings may kill younger ones with their sharp bills in case of food not being abundant. Young ones are fed with dragonflies rather than the stinging insects. In case of a heavy downpour, colonies may abandon a site and re-start elsewhere.

Local name: The Blue-tailed Bee-eater is known as '*bada patringa*' in Hindi, '*komu passiriki*' in Telugu and '*kattalan kuruvi*' or '*panchankam*' in Tamil.

Sighting of the Thick-billed Green Pigeon at Visakhapatnam

Aparna Surampudi



Thick-billed Green Pigeon (female)

(Photo: Vikram Penmetsa)

The Thick-billed Green Pigeon (*Treron curvirostra*) is a resident bird in the Himalayas - from western Nepal eastward to Sikkim, North Bengal Duars and Bhutan, to extreme eastern Arunachal Pradesh - as also in the hills of north-eastern India, south of the Brahmaputra River. It affects well-wooded areas and forests from plains to at least 1,500 m a.s.l. (Ali & Ripley 1987). Its occurrence in peninsular India has not been recorded (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 1998; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). There has been recent evidence of its presence in northern Eastern Ghats in the forests of Simlipal, Orissa (Nair 2010) and in Satkosia Tiger Reserve, Orissa (Durgesh 2010).

In this article, we report the sighting of the Thick-billed Green Pigeon for the first time in Visakhapatnam region in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Thotlakonda hillock is in northern Eastern Ghats ranges located along the east coast between latitude 17°49'35"N and 83°24'34"E longitude on the morning of 5th July, 2015 at 7.00AM.

The sprawling coastal city of Visakhapatnam is sandwiched between lush green hills with the Bay of Bengal on the eastern side. The city is located in a belt of tropical monsoon climate with two distinct rainy seasons that start in late June and end in mid-October. Thotlakonda Buddhist Complex lies about 15 km from Visakhapatnam city on the way to Bheemili town on a hill about 128 meters above Mean Sea Level overlooking the sea. It has dry deciduous forest interspersed with bushes and shrubs. The area is humid with an average rainfall of 900–1600 mm. Temperatures oscillate between 12°C–40°C. There are many wetland areas and coastal thorny scrub jungles harbouring myriad resident and migratory avifauna.

This individual was seen perching on the branches of an Acacia species tree near a man-made water tank. Observations were made from about 20 feet distance.

It is a rather small-sized pigeon being under 26 cm as compared to other green pigeons. A thick pale greenish bill with red base, broad bluish-green eye ring, grey crown and maroon mantle are diagnostic. Wings have black primaries and secondaries with yellow outer edge. Thighs are dark green with whitish scales. Female has greenish undertail-coverts with whitish scales. Males have maroon dorsum and dull chestnut undertail-coverts. The birds have a distinct bluish-green orbital skin, and a thicker yellow bill with red base, ruling out any misidentification. Pigeons are known to be nomadic outside their breeding season. It is classified as Least Concern in IUCN Red List, and distribution-wise, it is not reported from Visakhapatnam area.

However, a sighting in May is of additional interest as it falls in the breeding season of this species, which is April–June according to Rasmussen & Anderton (2005). Nair (2010) also suggested the same from Simlipal where the Thick-billed Green Pigeons have been sighted all the year round. This strengthens the chances of the presence of a breeding population in Eastern Ghats, and extends its range further south in peninsular India.

The main threats facing the northern Eastern Ghats include deforestation, hydropower projects, bauxite mining and road-widening. The massive impoundments that dams and their reservoirs have formed between the Andhra Pradesh and Odisha borders have submerged thousands of hectares of forests. Measures such as keeping a tab on forest encroachments, restricting road traffic particularly during the nights on the roadways traversing the Eastern Ghats and the Andhra-Odisha borders, and capacity building of local stakeholders will contribute to conservation of the northern Eastern Ghats region.

Our observations represent the presence of this species from the Eastern Ghats region in Andhra Pradesh possibly for the first time. It also beckons for further detailed investigations in these largely unexplored areas.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Mr. Vikram Penmetsa and Mr. Vivek Rathod for field support and contributing the photographs. I also stay obliged for the constant support and encouragement from the members of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh.

References:

Ali, S., & Ripley, S. D., 1987. Compact handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. 2nd ed.

Nair, M. V., 2010. Thick-billed Green Pigeon *Treron curvirostra* in Similipal Hills, Orissa: an addition to the avifauna of peninsular India. *Indian Birds* 6 (1): 19–20.

Birding at Night

Text and photos: Lawrence Mathappan

End of the summer with the arrival of monsoon awaited, we accompanied the young brigade of charged birders for a night's birding in the forests of Ananthagiri. Having made arrangements for our night halt at Vikarabad, the charged-up Anita, Amritha, Gowthama and Sudhir followed by Humayun and self geared up and reached Ananthagiri to find that the heat of day still had a grip on the forest. Impatient for action, we walked down into the silent forest to find movement and calls slowly picking up. Flashes of Bulbuls, Paradise-flycatchers, Oriental White-eyes around us cheered the spirits. As the sun dropped into the horizon, temperatures dropped and the activity picked up. The Magpie Robins, Tickell's Blue Flycatchers and the Babbler announced the end of the day by rushing around for the last meal.

Suddenly Anita saw a flash and said one word we were not prepared for: "Pitta!" she announced, and all other species went off the radar. We all looked in the direction of the pointed finger. Straining we looked through the shrubs; with the light fading everyone seemed to be praying for a glimpse, and suddenly the bird made a majestic appearance and flew off deeper into the forest.

We realized after searching for a while that we would not be able to see it as the light had faded and shadows had grown, covering the forest in a blanket of grey. After a lot of debate it was decided that as the bird was here at this time, we were bound to see it again in the vicinity in the morning; hence, marking the location, we left.

Visibility having dropped to a few meters, the realization of thirst and heat set in, and all of us voted for a break. As it was still early for the actors of the next session to enter the arena, on Humayun's suggestion we walked back and recharged ourselves. While we were refreshing ourselves the background changed. Cicadas, having entered the arena, started buzzing and the decibel level began to rise - Cicadas are known to be the loudest insects in the world with the African Cicada (*Brevisana brevis*) regularly producing 106.7db when measured at a distance of 50 cm - as loud as a motorcycle without its silencer!! They also have the longest life-cycle of any insect, ranging from 2 to 17 years.

Against this background came the melodious call of the Savannah and the Franklin's Nightjars. This put the energy back

into us - we walked back into the forest, mesmerized by the darkness and unable to see anything, but the sound of the dwellers going about their nocturnal functions pressed us to go further. Wanting to see a Nightjar at night, we pinpointed one call, the beam of light cut through the darkness and locked on to the Savannah, and the cameras were out trying to capture the image.

That was when we heard the ghostly "Hoo-hoo..." of the Brown Fish Owl. The beam turned to the new arrival, the taunting "Hoo-hoo..." continued and the beam searched, coming up with no image. The bird decided that enough was enough, and took off. We got a glimpse of a flashing shadow, and that was when one realized how stealthy an owl can be. Not being able to sight it we glumly turned our attention back to the Nightjars. The sound of the night dwellers grew - we could hear the tremulous wail of Mottled Wood Owl, and the bark of an Indian Wolf.

The clouds were building up so we decided to call it a day and returned to town for a hearty dinner and rest. The clouds opened up as we hit the bed. Early morning, all of us were ready, but the drizzle was challenging us. Determined, we set course, geared up for an early dose of birding - and, as if in sympathy, the rain gods decided to let up.

We walked into the forest and were met by the usual Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, apparently breeding close by, and a Magpie Robin father carrying the morning meal for his offspring. Trying to locate the nesting, we sighted an Orange-headed Thrush. We were surrounded by shrill calls and the ritual of the mating White-browed Fantail flycatchers. Far away, a female Crested Hawk Eagle was heard asking her mate for immediate attention.

We ventured further down the trail to the area marked in the hunt for sighting our friend the Pitta. As we walked, a flash of buff and red stopped us in our track. Having seen the flash earlier I was sure it was the Pitta. Seeing it for the first time other than on the BSAP T-shirts, I was awed by the colours - the fawn breast saddled by the cobalt-blue wings with a red seat, black mask tied around its eyes and the white spot as it opened its wings - amazing! We settled down on the track for a while, watching - that was when we realized that it was busy picking up nesting material, and we were also able to locate the site of the nest.



Indian Pitta

I noticed that Humayun was frowning... when asked for the reason, he said that there had to be two of them, as this species shares the nest-building activity. After a while though, we still couldn't identify whether they were two or not. The drums of the forest nearby makes us turn our focus to the drummer, and I said I could see a pair of Black-rumped Flameback. The younger eyes thought otherwise, and I stood corrected - it turned out to be the not-so-common White-naped Woodpecker!



White-naped Woodpecker

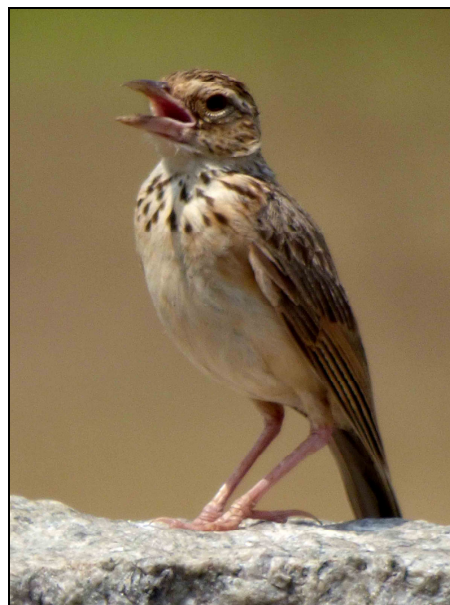
When I enquired whether it was nesting, I was told, "No", and when I asked why not, pat came the answer from almost all the others - "Look at the thickness of the sapling, Uncle!"

Before I could ask another question all heads had turned - following their direction I could see a dog-like creature trotting away at quite a distance. As usual the sharp reflexes of Sudhir caught the sight on camera. On looking at the zoomed image it clearly showed us the Indian Wolf, which also confirmed that the bark we heard the night before was that of the Wolf.

The day continued in similar vein - we observed an old nest of the Crested Hawk Eagle, but missed the call of the Indian Cuckoo, which was very vocal a week before. The sun was up and the birds seemed to have moved into the shade - the surroundings started to become quiet. We too followed the birds to a shaded perch and as we sat down, relaxing for a while, a Short-toed Snake Eagle flew past above us.

As nothing else was happening, we decided to move back and look around the other parts of the forest. As we went around, we visited the nesting site of the Red-rumped Swallows inside a small culvert under the road which we had seen a year ago. Surprisingly we found that the nest was still being used - we saw the birds gliding into the culvert at one end and exiting through the other.

By now, activity had slowed down, the sun had peaked and so had our gastronomical needs! We ended the trip treating ourselves to a sumptuous Hyderabad lunch, and reluctantly set course back to the city, promising to be back again soon.



Jerdon's Bushlark

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 10 October 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 11th October 2015: Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Located on the Vijayawada highway, the Park was started as a sanctuary for the endangered Black Buck, but it now houses considerable numbers of Cheetal. Besides, the Park usually yields good numbers of small woodland birds, ground birds like Partridges and Stone Curlew and, perhaps, even a Nightjar. Short-toed Snake Eagles are known to have nested in this park earlier. Also, with the nearby garbage yard having been relocated, there may be an improvement in the variety of bird life. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: “Waiting for the Rains”: 1st part of BBC’s “Wonders of the Monsoon” documentary series. Monday, 5th October 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist’s Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Step into a world where life is shaped by the greatest weather system on earth!

Monsoon winds sweep across a vast region every year, turning drought to deluge and shaping the landscapes, the wildlife and the cultures. All life here, from the highest peaks of the Himalayas to the scorched red earth of Australia, is dominated by this rampaging weather system.

GEOLOGICAL BIRDING

Trip Report – Geological Survey of India, 13th September 2015

Bhamidi Srikanth



Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

On kind invitation by Dr Samuel Sukumar, a field trip was organized to the Geological Survey of India (GSI) Training Institute. Joining up with the others at our regular meeting point in Punjagutta, we proceeded to the venue. When I first heard that this month’s trip was planned to GSI campus, I was really excited, as there is a lot of vegetation in the area, and I had been hearing about it for a long time.

The walk started at 6:30AM, and was attended by around 50 birders from BSAP, who were welcomed with a warm cup of tea near the hostels. The walk began with the sighting of a pair of Grasshoppers mating. Later, during the almost-6-km course of the walk, we spotted around 50 species of birds. The list included birds like Grey Francolins, Black-shouldered Kite, Shikra, Dusky Crag Martin and many other interesting species.



Shikra (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

One interesting incident during the trip was the sighting of what we initially identified as a Drongo Cuckoo, with the members of the group eagerly trying to understand and describe the diagnostic features of the bird... Unfortunately, to everyone's disappointment, it finally turned out to be a juvenile Black Drongo!



Black Drongo juvenile (Photo: Bhamidi Srikanth)

There was also a visit to the museum which showcased dinosaur bones and fossils from various time periods, and also several rare rock samples which helped us understand the work that GSI does.



Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

The most important highlight of our field trip was the fabulous breakfast organized by Dr. Sukumar, which everyone enjoyed to the fullest - heartfelt thanks to Dr Sukumar for arranging that breakfast, which was badly needed by our tired and dehydrated bodies!



Cattle Egret (Photo: Bhamidi Srikanth)

Then, of course, when the return was announced and we began compiling the list of birds, there was a little sadness that the trip had ended and we had to head back.

Birding has taught me one thing: "Whatever the difficult situation you might be in, when you view things at birds' eye view (i.e. take a broader perspective), it will always give you a solution."

The final list of sightings is given below:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
2	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
3	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
4	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
5	Lesser Whistling-duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
6	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
7	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>
8	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
9	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
10	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
11	Red-naped Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
12	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
13	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
14	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
15	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
16	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
17	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
18	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i>
19	Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>
20	Southern Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
21	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
22	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
23	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
24	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
25	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
26	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
27	Grey-breasted Prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
28	Jungle Prinia	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>
29	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
30	Large Grey Babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>
31	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa latirostris</i>
32	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
33	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
34	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>
35	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
36	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
37	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
38	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
39	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
40	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
41	Indian Silverbill	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>
42	Bay-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>
43	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
44	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
45	Dusky Crag Martin	<i>Hirundo concolor</i>
46	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
47	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
48	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)



Indian Golden Oriole Male (L) and Female (R) (Chennai, March 2015)

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Oriolidae

Genus: *Oriolus*

Species: *O. kundoo*

Size: 25 cm

Description & distribution: The Indian Golden Oriole is a member of the Oriolidae family. Like the Eurasian Golden Oriole (of which it was earlier considered a sub-species), the Indian Golden Oriole is a striking golden yellow-and-black in colour. The body is predominantly golden, and it has a pale red bill and irises, and a black mask with the eye-stripe extending behind the eye - the main feature differentiating it from the Eurasian Golden Oriole, with whom it was, until recently, considered conspecific. The Indian Golden Oriole has now been elevated to a separate species, due to differences in morphology, plumage and vocalizations; the two also appear not to intergrade. The Eurasian Golden Oriole is also larger in size.

The male Indian Golden Oriole has black wings with a small golden wing patch, and wide golden-yellow tips to the secondary and tertiary feathers. The female is more greenish-yellow overall, and the underparts are streaked; the streaks are sharper than those on the female Eurasian Golden Oriole. Juvenile birds have varying colouration depending on the age, and a first-year male could be confused with a female.

The Indian Golden Oriole is distributed across a large part of Asia - from Uzbekistan, Eastern Turkmenistan, South-Eastern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, extreme Western China (Tien Shan), Baluchistan hills, and from Northern and Eastern Afghanistan eastwards to Nepal, and south through most of

peninsular India. The non-breeding bird is also seen farther south in India and in Sri Lanka.

Habitat & behaviour: The Indian Golden Oriole is usually seen singly or in pairs. It inhabits a wide range of habitats, including open deciduous forests, semi-evergreen forests, woodlands, mangroves, open country with scattered trees, farmlands, paddy-fields, scrub areas, as well as parks, gardens, orchards and plantations in sub-tropical open country. It is considered a partial migrant, with the Indian population being largely resident, while the other populations are migratory. Northern populations winter in southern India and parts of Sri Lanka, while the populations seen in Maldives and the Andamans have not been properly studied.

The Indian Golden Oriole has a strong flight, dipping occasionally when covering longer distances, and is reminiscent of a thrush in flight. It has a harsh, screech-like call which doesn't seem to 'fit' the bird. The diet consists mainly of fruits, nectar and insects. They are known to disperse seeds of many plants, including the invasive *Lantana camara*.

Nesting: The Indian Golden Oriole breeds from April to August. The nest is a small cup, usually built in small forks near the end of a branch; nests are quite often placed near that of a Black Drongo. Both parents share nest-building, defence, incubation and feeding duties. The usual clutch consists of 2-3 white eggs, speckled reddish, brown and black.

Local name: The Indian Golden Oriole is known as 'peelak' in Hindi (a name also used for the Black-naped and the Black-hooded Orioles), 'vanga pandu' in Telugu and 'suvarna pakshi' in Kannada.

An Unexpected Trip to ICRISAT

Janani M



River Tern (Photo: Humayun Taher)

I had always wanted to see the ICRISAT campus, and this unexpected trip came about when my friend Prasad called me on that beautiful day around 10:00AM and asked if I wanted to come along. I immediately started with my camera and birding gear, and together we joined up with Humayun and Lawrence uncle.

Apart from the fact that ICRISAT campus was a birding hotspot with grasslands and water bodies I did not know much more. We reached the campus by late morning and, as we were entering the campus, Lawrence uncle mentioned that in their previous visit they had spotted an Indian Courser running towards its chicks at the entrance itself. So I was curious about seeing the bird for the first time, but unfortunately this time the family was absent. The campus layout, maintenance, security and the people who live there are of remarkable standards, and it may be due to these factors that our bird friends find this such a nice place to stay.

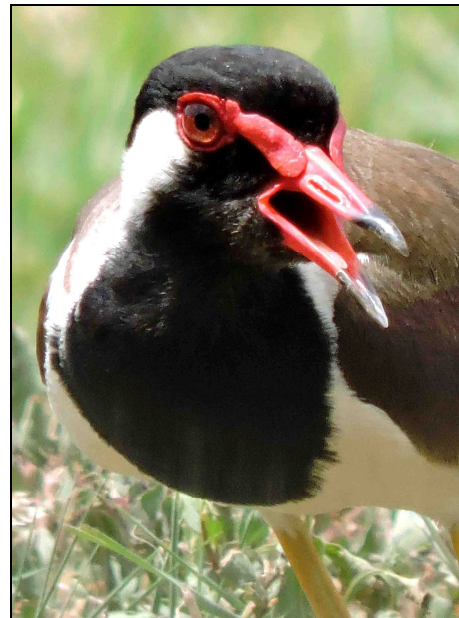
Having registered ourselves at the office and placed our things at the MILLET 'guestel' facility, the keen observation work of our eyes began. At the first lake, we spotted a Little Cormorant perched on a pole sticking out of the water. There were also a few Cattle Egrets. At the second lake, we spotted an Indian Moorhen.

At the third lake, while we were observing the Black-crowned Night Herons, we found a Pheasant-tailed Jacana swimming at the water's edge; it was nearly invisible as it moved around in the bushes.

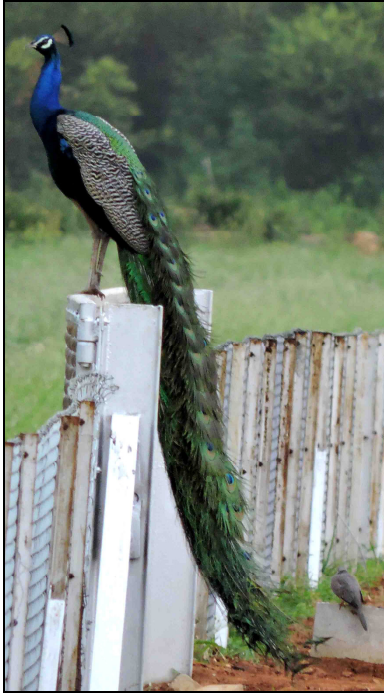
Later, as we were moving towards the Patancheru Lake, Humayun mentioned that on this route there was a strong possibility of sighting the Indian Stone Curlews; sadly, we were unable to see a single bird this time. We deduced that this was due to a group of Langoors which seemed to have taken up residence in the area.



Black-crowned Night Heron (Photo: Humayun Taher)



Red-wattled Lapwing (Photo: Janani M)



Indian Peafowl male (Photo: Janani M)

On the way, a Red-wattled Lapwing was announcing our presence to all its feathered friends. On the right side, some Indian Peafowl with their beautiful fully-grown tail feathers perched on the trees and other perches. All the way, on either side of the road, peacocks were displaying for the unconcerned peahens with the tail feathers fanned out.



Greater Flamingo (Photo: Humayun Taher)

On reaching the Patancheru Lake, we were surprised to see over a hundred majestic Greater Flamingos scattered around the lake in small flocks. It was a real surprise and wonder to see them at this time of the year as they normally should have left this place

long back. They were in a feeding frenzy unmindful of our presence. There were Common Coots at the other end of this lake, Black-tailed Godwits and Eurasian Spoonbills. The lake is not very secure for them, as it is outside the ICRISAT premises, and there was also a boat moving around in the lake - probably fishermen and the local folk.



Eurasian Spoonbill (Photo: Humayun Taher)

The next lake we visited was the ICRISAT Lake. It was completely dry and there was earth-moving equipment parked in the lake bed. We presumed some dredging work was going on in the feeder streams; this had left the resident Spot-billed Pelican, which has been staying there since a very long time, with a mere puddle of water. We were very worried about it and decided to talk to the authorities about this. Later we heard that, on Humayun's request, the ICRISAT authorities relocated the bird to the Red Lake where it has settled down and is doing well.



Oriental Pratincole adult (Photo: Humayun Taher)



Oriental Pratincole juvenile (Photo: Humayun Taher)

While passing through the grasslands, we spotted some Oriental Pratincoles on the track ahead. To our delight, we could also see that there were two juveniles in the area. Soon after that, we could hear Painted Francolins calling from somewhere close by, and we settled down there for some time in the hope of seeing one. To our disappointment, though, the bird fell silent and appeared to move away - its next call came from further away.



Indian Roller (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Later, we saw several birds like the Rufous Treepie, Indian Roller, Southern Coucal, Indian Silverbill and Pied Bushchat. But then, three things stopped us as we drove forward through this area:

One was a Painted Francolin, which was flushed just beside the car track, and which disappeared into the bushes; the second was a White-eyed Buzzard perched on a distant pole; and the third was a Shikra perching on a branch very close to us, which seemed to be deep in thought.



Shikra adult (Photo: Humayun Taher)



Shikra juvenile (Photo: Humayun Taher)

The White-eyed Buzzard flew in front of us again and we tried to get a good sight of it, but it refused to sit, continuously flew around us, and finally led us to a tree where several Baya Weavers were busy weaving their iconic nests.



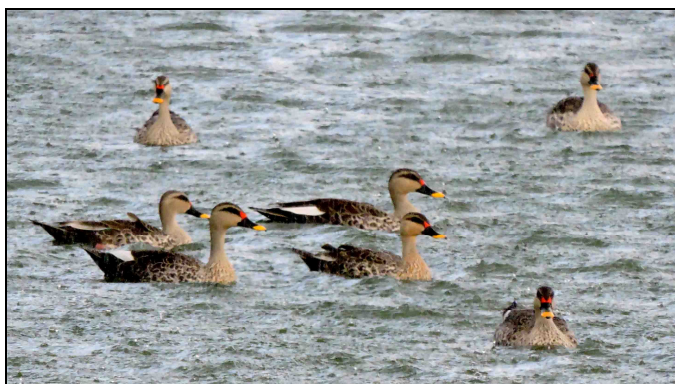
White-eyed Buzzard juvenile (Photo: Humayun Taher)

The climate became a bit cloudy, indicating rain. We reached another lake having a tiny island with many Large Cormorants nesting. We saw one with a strange white colouration on its head.



Large Cormorant (Photo: Humayun Taher)

We also sighted the Black-headed Ibis, several Grey Herons, a few Lesser Whistling-ducks, and many swimming Spot-billed Ducks.



Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Janani M)

A pair of Black-shouldered Kites kept moving from one place to another while I was trying to get a snap of them. Lawrence uncle tried to photograph a Zitting Cisticola in the grass, but it flew away.

Near the lake we met our host Cynthia, who seemed very excited about birding. She said that she would be joining us the next morning to see the Flamingos at the Patancheru Lake.

It was becoming dark and we started on our way back to the MILLET guest room. On the way we found a pair of Indian Thick-knees in the drizzling weather.



Indian Thick-knee (Photo: Humayun Taher)

After an excellent dinner at the canteen, we moved back to the road for some night birding. A few Black-naped Hares and an Indian Thick-knee was all we spotted, but due to security reasons we had to cut short our night trip and move back to MILLET. After preparing the day's list, we decided to take catch some much-needed sleep.



Indian Thick-knee by night (Photo: Humayun Taher)



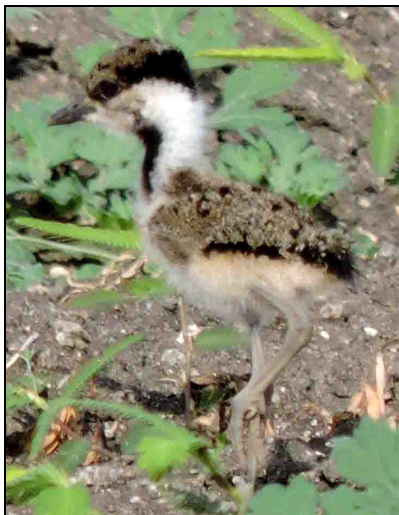
Baya Weaver (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Early morning found us back at the Patancheru Lake, where we were again greeted by the flocks of Greater Flamingos. Cynthia joined us there and captured some wonderful pink moments. We also spotted a Bronze-winged Jacana walking along the edge of the water on its elongated toes, some Baya Weavers in the reeds, and a Brahminy Kite in flight.

We moved to towards the spot where we had found the Oriental Pratincoles the previous day as Cynthia was very keen to see these. Just then, Prasad yelled 'raptor'!

First we thought it was the same White-eyed Buzzard we saw the day before but when we moved towards it, we realized it was something else. Humayun cautiously moved towards it at a slow pace and captured some shots before it flew away.

The day was heating up by now, so we started back towards the canteen to have some breakfast, being stopped on the way by the sighting of two tiny Red-wattled Lapwing chicks in a ploughed field.



Red-wattled Lapwing chick (Photo: Janani M)

Finally we reached the canteen and, as we ate our breakfast, we discussed about the raptor without being able to reach a proper consensus. (I later learnt that the raptor had been identified by other experts as a Tawny Eagle.)



Tawny Eagle (Photo: Humayun Taher)

We bid adieu to Cynthia and packed our things as we had to get back to the city. On the way out, we did one final check of the lakes, and finally bid our farewells to the campus which is protecting our bird friends.

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 01-10-2012)

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)

Editor's note

Some of our members had been to Talakona Reserve Forest for a birding camp from 21st to 23rd of August, 2015. In this Special Issue of the Pitta, we are happy to bring you the experiences shared by the participants, along with a number of colourful photographs.

Day One

Lakshmi Vishwanathan



Photo contributed by: Sana Ali Baquer

Right from the time Mr Shafaat Ulla first proposed the idea of a trip to Sri Venkateshwara National Park, we were completely smitten by the prospect of birding in the Talakona region, with its natural beauty, its waterfalls, its flora and fauna. Being ardent wildlife enthusiasts and passionate birders, we eagerly looked forward to the trip.

This sanctuary sprawls across the Eastern Ghats, covering parts of Seshachalam Hills, Cuddapah, Tirupati, and Chittoor, and comprises moist deciduous forests with bamboo and, hold your breath, leopards! The thought of spotting the endemic plant of this region, the Red Sanders, which has been attracting smugglers in India and elsewhere in Asia in the recent past, gave us goose bumps.

All journeys have their twists and turns, and so did ours. Our train, the Narayanadri Express, was more than one hour late, making some of us quite impatient. However, as we exited the station premises, a White-breasted Kingfisher, perched on a lamppost, greeted us. Being a city-bred, newbie birder, I couldn't have asked for a better welcome. At 10:00AM, we boarded a bus for Talakona which is 70km away from Tirupati.



Photo: Amardeep Singh



Spotted Owlet (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

The plan was to head to Kalyani Dam, on the way to Talakona, to look for passerine and water birds. During the ride, we halted more than once to spot different avian residents of the region. After all, birding is our second nature! We scanned trees and shrubs through our bus windows. The more experienced birders stopped the bus as soon as they saw high boulders and rocks, hoping to find some raptors. As we strained our eyes a little, we sighted a Short-toed Snake Eagle holding its prey in its beak. The black silhouette of the big bird against the sun looked melancholic in an almost poetic way.

Soon we came across a cute, wide-eyed Spotted Owlet on a tree, peering down at us. I gloated after I finally managed to spot it through my binoculars.

Bright and beautiful Emerald Doves and Spotted Doves perched on cables along the highway. Once we entered the terrain of Kalyani Dam, we were welcomed by a call that closely resembled the sound 'Brain Fever'. On asking, I got to know that it is the Common Hawk Cuckoo, which is also known due to its call as the Brain-fever Bird. Following its call, we kept walking down the forest track, and finally spotted the rather well-camouflaged bird. Interestingly, in the process, we found a huge colony of Red Velvet Mites busily crawling through the irregular patches of wild, green grass.



Red Velvet Mite (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

I almost stepped on a rather deadly-looking Tiger Centipede. I soon learnt that exploring a forest is much more than just adding to my list of birds.

We came across a beautiful large Blue Mormon and a Crimson Tip butterfly fluttering among the wild flowers nearby. We also saw a Paddle Cactus bush with a generous scattering of large yellow flowers. To my

horror, I almost



Common Hawk Cuckoo (Photo: Guru Kumar KR)



Crimson Tip (Photo: S Raghupathy)

At the dam, there weren't many sightings, which we blamed on poor rainfall. One spotting was a distant Grey Heron busily hunting for fish in the scanty pool of water.

Finally, we reached 'Jungle Huts', our accommodation. Our guest houses were quaint-looking dwellings amidst the greenery. As I set foot into my room, all I needed desperately was a cold shower!

Through the day we watched birds with an amazing variety of plumage - the Almighty is a true artist! We saw the Asian Paradise-flycatcher; Small, Ashy and Rosy Minivets; Black-hooded Oriole; Streak-throated and Red-rumped Swallows; Green Imperial Pigeon;



CBET Camp (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Black-rumped Flameback; Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker; Rufous Treepie; Indian Roller; Indian Bushlark; Indian Grey Hornbill; Changeable Hawk Eagle; Crested Serpent Eagle and Shikra. Some of these birds are generally shy and are far too well-camouflaged in a forest such as this, so I must add that we were a lucky batch of birders. It may be interesting to know that the Grey Hornbill is an endangered species in the region.



Yellow-browed Bulbul (Photo: Umesh Mani)

and we retired to our nests after having had a hot, spicy dinner. Soon, we fell asleep in the lap of the lush green jungle.

One of the things that made the day challenging was spotting twitchy birds that hopped from one branch to another amid thick bamboo plantations. I got to know that there are certain species of birds such as the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher that need to be sighted purely based on their call. They are restless avians that hop around within a territory. When you have to sight a bird such as this in a bamboo forest, it is all the more challenging. In short, the first day of the trip was exciting enough to look forward to the next day.

Some birds that are quite widespread in the region include Black-naped Monarch, Yellow-browed Bulbul, White-bellied Drongo, Black Drongo, Blue-faced Malkoha, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Green Bee-eater, White-rumped Shama, Tawny-bellied and Jungle Babblers, Red-vented and Red-whiskered Bulbuls, and Purple-rumped Sunbirds. These birds are as common as the crow is in urban settlements, and we did get to see many of these species.

A little later, night fell,



Black-naped Monarch (Photo: Guru Kumar KR)



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Day Two Madhuri Mondal



Photo: Sathvik Reddy

It was the second day of our camp and the plan was to bird first in the dense forest behind the CBET huts and then, post-breakfast, around the Talakona Waterfalls. However, due to heavy rains we couldn't start that early. We used the time to have tea while a team from Carl Zeiss displayed their new range of binoculars.

When the rain god finally had a little mercy on us, we crossed a small stream of water and walked on a trail which took us through the bamboo forests. Barely had we started we heard a sharp call which, I learnt, was that of the Changeable Hawk Eagle. As I tried to spot it, I noticed a White-bellied Drongo sitting on a branch. It was indeed a good start to our birding. A few seconds later I was looking through my binoculars and saw some orange-yellow color flashing by and I knew it was a woodpecker! It turned out to be the Black-rumped Flameback. It was indeed a 'yippee' moment for me: firstly my binoculars were new, and secondly I usually had little luck in spotting these lovely woodpeckers and owlets.



Common Woodshrike
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

binoculars, I spotted a raptor sitting on a tree far inside the woods. After a detailed look and discussion, it was identified as the Crested Serpent Eagle and all of us were enthralled to have spotted two grand raptors within an hour. It was the highlight of the morning trail.

I then joined another group of birders, who had spotted the Orange



Shikra (Photo: Umesh Mani)

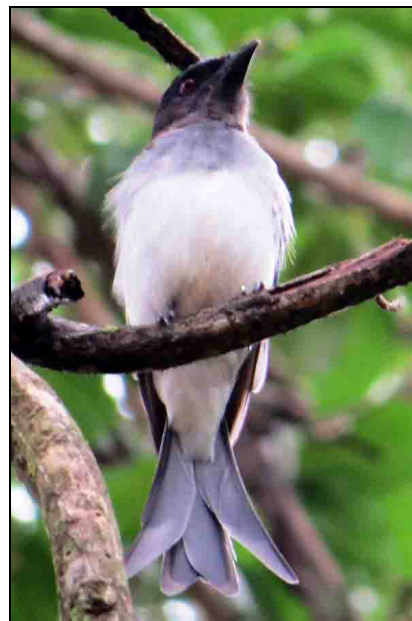
We also spotted Indian Grey Hornbills and Common Woodshrikes. The Ashy Minivet was a rare sighting for that place. Soon we spotted many colorful Small and Rosy Minivets hopping here and there on a tree. We could also hear many birds but I couldn't recognize the calls. Humayun told us they were the calls of the Common Iora, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher and Brown-headed Barbet. I was curious to know how people differentiate and remember bird calls so easily. He told us that the trick was to identify and memorize one call at a time and not to try to memorize everything on a single day.

Suddenly, we heard the Changeable Hawk Eagle calling again and on checking through my

headed

Thrush. In many places we found that the soil had been dug up by Wild Boar. We also spotted the Grey-breasted Prinia, a Shikra and a pair of Grey Hornbills. By now, we were running late and also almost lost our way. By the time we got back to the Guest House, most of our fellow birders had already left for Sri Venkateshwara Wildlife Sanctuary. We quickly had our breakfast and got into the last bus, but sadly, I could not get my camera as I had left it in the room, which was now locked.

The sanctuary was around 2 kms from the CBET Guest House. The buses stopped near the gate and we started birding right from there. We watched a Shikra through the Zeiss scope, which made it appear very close.



White-bellied Drongo
(Photo: Humayun Taher)



Golden-fronted Leafbird (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Malabar Giant Squirrel (Photo: Humayun Taher)



Glassy Tiger butterflies mating
(Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

group had spotted the Pompadour Green Pigeon. As it would be a lifer for many of us, we all started looking for it enthusiastically. In the meantime, I saw the White-rumped Shama, beautifully posing and singing, and also the Brown-headed Barbet.

It was nearing lunch time so we thought of having a look at the Talakona Waterfalls. On our way we saw two Giant Squirrels playing and jumping through the trees. The waterfall was around a



Green Imperial Pigeon (Photo: Umesh Mani)

After walking a little ahead we could see the beautiful rocky hills of Talakona. On the way, we spotted the Oriental Magpie Robin, Black-hooded Oriole, Black-rumped Flameback, Pale-billed Flowerpecker and some other common birds. Some people spotted the Malabar Giant Squirrel and the Barking Deer.

In our group, we had people with expertise in different areas of nature and wildlife. As we walked, Mr. Ragupathy told us about the trees and Lianas found here, and showed us the naturally growing sandalwood tree. Nupur and I were quite enthusiastic about butterflies and we noticed many beautiful ones like the Tailed Jay, Glassy Tiger and the White Orange Tip, to name a few.

After reaching a point where the route to Talakona and Nelakona waterfalls diverge, we stopped to watch a few Oriental White-eyes and Yellow-browed Bulbuls playing and feeding.

We, a team of three, started climbing the naturally formed steps when we heard that a

kilometer and a half from that point and I quickly walked the stretch enjoying the forest all around, and the occasional Blue Mormon butterfly flying along. The waterfall was also quite majestic and beautiful as it had rained heavily the night before.

As we missed going into the forest behind the huts in the morning, after lunch we headed that way for birding. But we couldn't spot anything other than the Black-hooded Oriole, so we decided to take the morning trail through the bamboo forest again.

The evening brought interesting sightings like Asian Paradise-flycatchers, Green Imperial Pigeon and the Minivets. As we walked further, a close shot by one of the photographers revealed a Black-naped Monarch, which was initially mistaken for a Fantail Flycatcher.



White-rumped Shama
(Photo: Madhuri Mondal)



Pompadour Green Pigeon (Photo: Umesh Mani)

We saw fresh elephant dung in many places and Mr. Suresh, our host, informed us that wild elephants had been sighted there recently and advised us not to go too far.

As the sun was setting, we walked back; content, yet longing for more. A birder always yearns for more. It was a satisfying day with great sightings! I have never birded for such a long time at a stretch except during the Bird Races. In the forests of Talakona, with its pleasant climate and a great group, it was a wonderful and memorable day for me and, I am sure, for everyone!

Day Three

Sana Ali Baquer



Photo: Umesh Mani

Birders and adventure enthusiasts' hearts often yearn to venture out into the unknown, especially when they get stuck in a city for more than a year due to certain unforeseen incidents. It would come as no surprise, therefore, that the jungles of Talakona instilled in me a fresh lease of life. Just a month earlier, I had planned a trek in the Himalayas which got cancelled due to incessant rain. Still, although I had given my name for the birding camp, I was somewhat doubtful because the group of people slated to come for this trip was quite large at 45. But I am so glad I went, for not only were we able to spot some 115 species, but the friends I made at Talakona turned out to be extremely warm and affectionate.

The day began with the alarm call of a mobile phone kept at a little distance from my comfortable bed. Some of my fellow birders were already up and awake at 4:30AM, one for yoga, some for waking up others. But I was desperate to grab a few more winks, and so I ducked back under the covers, just like my friend, Madhuri, in her bed nearby. Both of us like sleeping in on a weekend, and the typical early start on a birding trip is quite challenging. To add to that, the 15km walk on Day-2 to the Talakona waterfalls had drained us of our energies. Extensive birding I say!

But the mobile alarm kept on ringing - I prayed that it would stop, or someone would throw the contraption out of the window. (Apologies to whoever it belonged to!)



Blue Mormon (Photo: S Raghupathy)

Finally I got up at 5:15AM and opened the dormitory door to see an emerald green spectacle. The trees and the grass on



Red Sanders fruit (L) and leaves (R) (Photo: S Raghupathy)

the ground had become lush green due to the incessant rainfall through the night. The earth was wet and alive with myriad life in imperfect harmony. I could see tiny blades of grass sprouting from the corners of my porch. A few butterflies - Blue Tiger, Crimson Rose, Chocolate Pansy - were flitting around the flowers and the Red Sanders trees.



Blue Mormon (Photo: S Raghupathy)

A cloud of mist had engulfed the log huts in the vicinity, and the gurgling stream on the left had widened its course and strengthened its flow. I could hear a few bird calls and saw a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher actually perched on our porch - perhaps to greet us! The tiny bird was drenched in the morning showers and the coral blue colour looked exquisite. This bird was a regular on all the three days at the dormitory of the campsite, but on Day-3, it stayed a little longer - possibly because we were to return that day to the dreary concrete jungle.

I was greeted by Sathvik, who was busy clicking pictures of the trees, log huts and any birds he could find. A few brethren were sipping hot tea and munching crispy samosas. Mr Raghupathy was helping people in identifying a few plants and trees, such as the Bidi Leaf and the Hairy Fig Tree. A few minutes later, I saw Lawrence, Humayun, Sudhir and Karthik engrossed in a very interesting discussion. Apparently Sudhir and Karthik had seen a leopard at 1:30AM near their room, but unfortunately couldn't click a picture as the beast had quickly disappeared into the thicket. Quizzing Sudhir a little, I honestly wished that I could have caught a glimpse of the Leopard too.

After packing breakfast and before leaving for the Siddalagandi Lake, where we were to bird that day, we all gathered for a group picture.



Mayurashikha *Actinopteris radiata*
(Photo: K Mrutyunjaya Rao)

Some of the birders decided to stay back and bird across the rivulet. The rest of us took the minibuses and started off. Our group, after losing our way for about half an hour and not being able to trace the whereabouts of the other

members who were ahead of us, stopped at a spot near Kotakadapalli Village. At this particular spot we were overjoyed to see three types of Drongos - Black, White-bellied and Ashy - hovering around a small branch. The movement of all the three seemed quite alike. Other birds seen at this place were Large-billed crow, Green Bee-eater, and a Tawny-bellied Babbler.

We were later joined by Suresh, our host for the trip, and the other fellow birders. When he got out of his car, I saw that he was holding a juvenile Pied Crested Cuckoo in his hands. The poor bird looked lifeless. I asked Suresh where he had

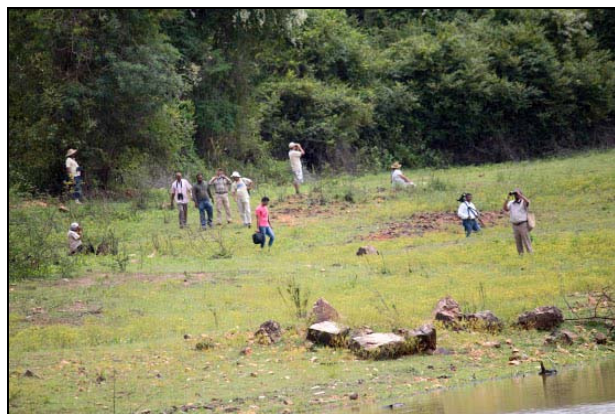


Photo: Raghu Sravan Railla

found the bird, and he told me that he had seen a 12-year-old boy carrying it; on inquiry, the lad said that somebody had hit the bird and he had found it on the roadside. The bird was still warm at the time Suresh took it, but died soon after. Madhuri, Sathvik, Nupur and I were quite upset by the news. It saddened me to think that people still kill wild birds for sport or meat.

Anyway, after breakfast, we headed towards the Siddalagandi Lake. We spent a few hours here to see water birds and anything else that could catch our eye. We were fortunate to see Fulvous Whistling-ducks, apart from Lesser Whistling-ducks. Fulvous Whistling Ducks are inhabitants of open waters and clear areas. Although they are quite common in places like Kolleru and Vizag, seeing them here became a conversation piece for many fellow birders.



Oriental Skylark (Photo: Guru Kumar KR)



The much-debated pug marks (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

Sathvik suggested that we should split up and see if we could find some more species. Our splinter group took a narrow path surrounded by a thick cover of shrubs. As soon as we walked in, I spotted the tracks of a boar and, a few meters ahead, the tracks of a canine which, on debate, changed into those of a feline. These pug marks were quite large and we sat down to measure them. The consensus was that they were made by a leopard, and were around a day old, since the soil was slightly warm and wet. We decided to change our tracks and ran for the bigger group near the lake. Nobody wanted to take a chance on coming face to face with a leopard! But I was glad to at least see the pug marks, as most of us had missed an opportunity to see a full grown leopard at dawn.

On the way, we stopped to watch Spotted Owlets - a couple of juveniles and adults who were perched on a tree - and a Black Eagle and a Short-toed Snake Eagle.

Back at the camp, we were greeted by those of our fellow birders who had stayed back, and we had a lively discussion on the sightings of the day. After lunch, Suresh, our host, presented us all with a Certificate of Participation - a lovely gesture from his side!

The time had come to say goodbye to the Community Based Eco-Tourism Camp, the people who stayed there and had made our stay comfortable. As always, we were not happy to leave. I feel caged in the city, and find the sights and sounds of the jungle quite liberating, and so, I look forward to many trips with the Society - and, probably, a few on my own!!



Photo: Amardeep Singh

* * *

Some other photos taken during the trip:



Red-rumped Swallow (Photo: Humayun Taher)



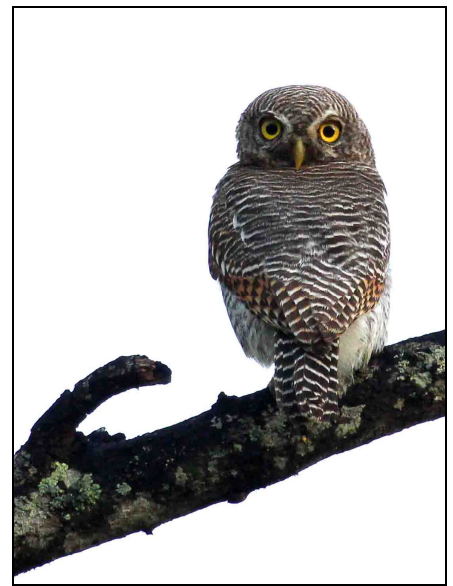
House Sparrow (Photo: Guru Kumar KR)



Streak-throated Woodpecker
(Photo: Gunbir Singh)



Bombardier Beetle (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)



Jungle Owlet (Photo: Sudhir Moorti)



Dung Roller Beetle (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)



Giant Wood Spider (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)



Common Gull (Photo: S Raghupathy)



Liana *Entera rheedii* (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)



Veiled Lady fungus
(Photo: Madhuri Mondal)



Asian Brown Flycatcher
(Photo: Umesh Mani)



Liana *Entera rheedii* (Fruit)
(Photo: S Raghupathy)



Indian Cadaba *Cadaba fruticosa* (Photo: S Raghupathy)



Common Prickly Pear *Opuntia macrorhiza* (Photo: S Raghupathy)



Rock Agama (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)



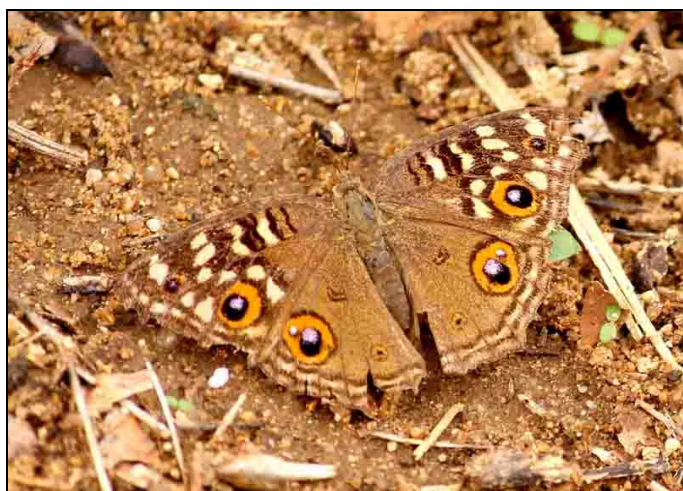
Heart Fern *Hemionitis arifolia* (Photo: S Raghupathy)



Maple-leaved Mallow *Hibiscus plataniifolius*
(Photo: S Raghupathy)



Oval-leaved Pondweed *Monochoria korsakowii*
(Photo: S Raghupathy)



Yellow Pansy (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)



Tiger Centipede (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

Complete list of birds seen during the trip:

	Species	Scientific name
1	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
2	Large Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
3	Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
4	Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
5	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
6	Indian Pond-heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
7	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
8	Fulvous Whistling-duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>
9	Lesser Whistling-duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
10	Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
11	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
12	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
13	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
14	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
15	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
16	Indian Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
17	Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i>
18	Crested Hawk-Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>
19	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>
20	Red Spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix spadicea</i>
21	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
22	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
23	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia intermedia</i>
24	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
25	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
26	Red Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
27	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
28	Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
29	Grey-fronted (Pompadour) Green Pigeon	<i>Treron affinis</i>
30	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicopterus</i>
31	Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
32	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
33	Jacobin Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
34	Southern Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
35	Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>
36	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>
37	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
38	Common Hawk Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>
39	Barred Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>
40	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>
41	Asian Palm-swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
42	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>

43	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
44	White-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
45	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
46	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
47	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus birostris</i>
48	Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
49	White-cheeked Barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>
50	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
51	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos nanus</i>
52	Streak-throated Woodpecker	<i>Picus xanthopygaeus</i>
53	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
54	Indian Bushlark	<i>Mirafra erythroptera</i>
55	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>
56	Rufous-tailed Lark	<i>Ammomanes phoenicura</i>
57	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
58	Streak-throated Swallow	<i>Hirundo fluvicola</i>
59	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>
60	Rosy Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus roseus</i>
61	Ashy Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus divaricatus</i>
62	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
63	Large Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis gularis</i>
64	Common Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>
65	Asian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
66	Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
67	White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
68	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
69	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
70	White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
71	Yellow-browed Bulbul	<i>Iole indica</i>
72	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
73	Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
74	Jerdon's Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>
75	Bay-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>
76	Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>
77	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa latirostris</i>
78	Brown-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>
79	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>
80	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
81	Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>
82	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
83	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
84	Indian Black Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus fulicatus</i>
85	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata bicolor</i>
86	Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>
87	Indian Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus horsfieldii</i>

88	Tawny-bellied Babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>
89	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striata</i>
90	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
91	Brown-cheeked Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe poiocephala</i>
92	Grey-breasted Prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
93	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
94	Jungle Prinia	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>
95	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
96	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
97	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>
98	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
99	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>
100	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
101	Loten's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>
102	Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
103	Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>
104	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
105	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
106	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
107	Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>
108	Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriole xanthornus</i>
109	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
110	Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
111	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
112	Ashy Woodswallow	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>
113	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
114	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
115	Indian Jungle Crow	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 12 November 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 15th November 2015: Ananthagiri Hills & Kotepally Tank. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Besides being a pleasant woodland walk, Ananthagiri has always been very productive from the birding viewpoint, and is a paradise for forest birds. One can see Flycatchers, White-eyes, Chloropsis, Orange-headed Thrush, Nightjars, among others. The Indian Pitta and the Brown Fish Owl have been reported earlier. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: "Deluge": 2nd part of BBC's "Wonders of the Monsoon" documentary series. Monday, 2nd November 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Step into a world where life is shaped by the greatest weather system on earth!

Monsoon winds sweep across a vast region every year, turning drought to deluge and shaping the landscapes, the wildlife and the cultures. All life here, from the highest peaks of the Himalayas to the scorched red earth of Australia, is dominated by this rampaging weather system.

THE SEARCH...IN THE GRASSLANDS OF ROLLAPADU
Trip Report – Rollapadu WLS, 18th-19th September 2015

Anita Negi



Photo: Humayun Taher

It was a Friday evening (18th Sep'15), when we (Humayun, Lawrence Uncle, Sudhir, Bindu, Gowthama & I) started off to our weekend birding destination, Rollapadu, in the hopes of spotting the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Florican.

We met at Humayun's house around 4:00PM on Friday evening and took off to our destination with two cars accommodating us all. The plan was to reach Kurnool around 8:00PM and rest there for the night before starting off to Rollapadu early next morning to watch the Lesser Florican in display.

As per the plan, we managed to reach Kurnool around 8:00PM and zeroed in on 'Haritha' for our night halt. After checking into the Tourism Dept rest house at Kurnool, we took out some time for dinner, and the rest of the time was spent in excitedly

discussing the possible sightings of the next day. The loud discussion in the hotel room was suddenly interrupted by a knock on the door - and we had Amritha, Gokul and Sathvik, who had started a little late, join us. After spending some time together discussing various topics, we decided to call it a day with the promise to meet near the car parking by 5:00AM sharp the next morning.

With three girls put up in the same room, it was definitely going to be a challenge to make it on time the next morning! However, after all the hustle bustle, we came running down to the car park at around 5:10AM. Needless to say the others - men ;-) - were impatiently waiting for us, as we had to reach Rollapadu by sunrise. Starting off without further delay, we reached Rollapadu around 6:00AM after having tea on the way to refresh ourselves.

About Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary:

Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary, covering an area of 6.14 km² in the Kurnool district, is known primarily as a habitat of the Great Indian Bustard. It was established in 1988 to protect the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Florican, and remains the only habitat in Andhra Pradesh for the Bustard, which is a critically endangered species. Rollapadu is primarily a grassland ecosystem with mixed forests and thorny bushes. Cotton, tobacco and sunflower are cultivated in the agricultural lands that border the sanctuary. It also houses 132 bird species with the Alganur reservoir near the sanctuary frequented annually by migratory species.



Southern Grey Shrike
(Photo: Humayun Taher)

Bang On..... We were at Rollapadu at 6:00AM in spite of our late start - the girls prevailed!



Common Hawk Cuckoo
(Photo: Lawrence Mathappan)

On the way to Rollapadu from Kurnool, we sighted the Indian Roller, Common Hawk Cuckoo, Southern Grey Shrike, House Crow, Common Myna, Indian Robin, Pied Bushchat, Drongos & Kingfishers, to name a few.

We were a convoy of three cars now, with Amritha, Sathvik & Gokul joining us. We moved at a slow pace as we neared the Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary, since we didn't want to miss out on the farmlands around the sanctuary which also offered the potential of sighting the Great Indian Bustard & the Lesser Florican.



Yellow-billed Babbler (Photo: Lawrence Mathappan)

As we entered the Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary, we were welcomed by the pleasant chirping of various birds. On looking around, we were happy to get sightings of Golden Orioles, Rose-ringed Parakeets, Black Drongo, Yellow-billed Babblers, Common Mynas, Laughing Doves & Eurasian Collared Doves, all bunched up in one tree as if they were happily enjoying their morning meal on one table, leaving the photographers in the group with enough time to capture the moment.



Laughing Dove (Photo: Anita Negi)

As we were about to move on from the entrance to the grasslands, there was a fluttering sound in the same tree, persuading us to spend some more time there. Scanning the tree thoroughly, we found a couple of Spotted Owlets scrutinizing us from the thick cover before flying off to a nearby tree.



Red-rumped Swallow (Photo: Lawrence Mathappan)

On walking a little ahead, we saw a few Red-rumped Swallows bathing religiously in a small pool of water on the ground very close by. I pulled out my camera instantly, not wanting to miss the moment, telling myself “it is not a big deal to get a good shot of these birds. If I get it this close, I too can be a good photographer!” - but all in vain! - as usual I couldn’t get a single good shot. Kudos to all the photographers, it is indeed a very challenging endeavour.

The sun had started to show up, and we realized that if we didn’t get into the sanctuary right away, we might miss the display of the Lesser Florican as it displays mainly in the mornings & evenings only. We got into the cars again, this time to take a ride on the muddy roads of the sanctuary. Packed in one car Sudhir, Gowtham & I were praying to God that we would get to see the Lesser Florican this time, as we had never seen it in spite of having visited the sanctuary several times before.

After driving just a few metres into the sanctuary, we heard Lawrence Uncle shout from the other car “Florican!” We literally jumped out, leaving our cars in the middle of the road. Lawrence Uncle pointed to a patch of grassland towards the left in excitement, but the Florican was nowhere to be seen. But he was very sure that he had seen the Florican jump out of the tall grass.

We decided to halt there and wait. We all stood there with our cameras facing the spot, and then suddenly it jumped out again, and our happiness knew no bounds.

Humayun and Lawrence Uncle asked us to relax and quietly sit at a spot without making noise, as the Lesser Florican was displaying, and would jump up again. After waiting quietly for some time, there was a sudden outburst of the clicking of cameras as the Florican gave a glorious display, jumping in and out of the grass.



Lesser Florican (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

We were extremely lucky to have spotted it immediately after entering the sanctuary. The best part was we didn’t just spot the Florican, but also saw it displaying. Extremely satisfied, we decided to move on and come back to the same spot later in the evening.

About Lesser Florican & Their Display During The Breeding Season:

*Lesser Florican is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent, where it is found in tall grasslands and is best known for the leaping breeding displays made by the males during the monsoon season. These Bustards are found mainly in north-western and central India during the summer, but are found more widely distributed across India in winter. The species is **highly endangered** and has been extirpated in some parts of its range such as Pakistan. It is threatened both by hunting and habitat degradation.*

During the breeding season, males leap suddenly from the grass with a peculiar croaking or knocking call, flutter their wings and fall back with slightly open wings. At the apogee of the leap the neck is arched backwards and the legs folded as if in a sitting posture. These jumps are repeated after intervals of about three or more minutes. The displays are made mainly in the early mornings and late evenings, but during other parts of the day in cloudy weather.

We got into our cars again and began moving slowly in convoy. Then Humayun saw a bird fly across and stopped the car. The bird went and perched in a bush nearby. It looked slightly larger than a Prinia and wagged its tail up and down. As we walked closer to the bird, we were all excited to find the Common Babbler, which is not so commonly found in the city. While we were busy shooting the bird, a few more joined the group and we realized there was an entire flock there. We had seen the Common Babbler in Rollapadu earlier, but not in so many numbers. We high-fived each other on our finding.



Common Babbler (Photo: Anita Negi)



Common Stonechat
(Photo: Lawrence Mathappan)

Extremely motivated, we decided to park our cars and take a small walk ahead to catch the other birds as it was still only around 8:30AM. There were Stonechats sitting on almost every alternate bush.

As we were walking, a flock of some 25 birds took off from right next to us; on closer observation we realized that it was a flock of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, who had been quietly sun-bathing, unaware of our presence. They camouflaged so well with the orange stones of Rollapadu that it was almost impossible to see them.



Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (Photo: Humayun Taher)

By now, our day was already made. I personally started ignoring the presence of Drongos, Indian Robins, Paddyfield Pipits & Bushchats around after the fantabulous start of the day. The expectations were high now!

We decided to get back to the Florican to check if it had come out in the open. Suddenly Sudhir put his head out of the car, pointed at a dry tree and shouted "Raptor!" We stared out of the window to find a Red-necked Falcon perched on top of a dry tree, giving a magnificent view. But as we pulled out our cameras, the bird took off and disappeared. But it was a lovely sighting on a totally dry tree with no foliage to obstruct the view of the near-threatened bird.



Red-necked Falcon
(Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

The sun had started to get hotter by now, and the birds had started to take shelter after the busy morning schedule. Even the

Laughing Doves started to act 'pricey'. Humayun suggested we mount the watch tower to check for the Harriers and the Bustard (Just in case we got lucky!).

We all lined up and took turns to go to the top of the watchtower in batches of four. The Harriers had not arrived, as it was still a little early for the winter migrants. The Great Indian Bustard was not to be seen anywhere.

As we looked at the grassland from the top we realized that grassland had transformed completely from our earlier visits. It was not as lush and thick as before for the Bustard to nest or hide. All we could see was the Blackbuck. The disturbing fact is that about 100 Bustards were estimated in Rollapadu grasslands in 1985, which declined to 37 by 2005, and now to less than five - all of which are said to be females, leaving no possibility of numbers increasing in the future. What could be the reason for such drastic fall of these critically endangered birds? A number of reasons have contributed to such steep decline, according to experts in the field & conservationists.

Great Indian Bustard & Reasons For Its Declining Numbers:

The Great Indian Bustard is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act.

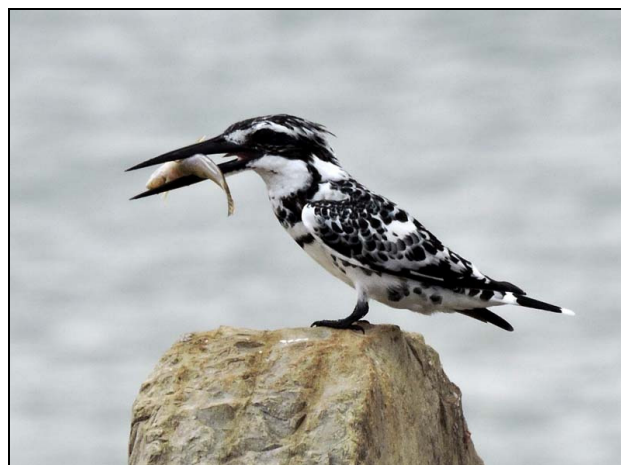
An increase in the blackbuck population at the sanctuary has been postulated as one of the reasons for the fall in numbers of the bustard and the florican there. Their feeding on the grasses has in turn led to a fall in the numbers of grasshoppers and locusts that constitute an important source of food for the two bird species (Great Indian Bustard & Lesser Florican), besides also reducing the nesting area available to these ground-nesting birds.

A major issue has been lack of enough habitats for the birds. The Bustards depend on dry grasslands and cannot survive in areas with any other vegetation. Over the years, with the linking of Telugu Ganga Canal with Alganur Tank (a tank 2 km away from Rollapadu Sanctuary), there has been an increase in availability of water and the ecosystem has changed from dry grasslands to greener pastures. Even the farming practice has changed from dry land agriculture to water-intensive crops. With this change, the birds have gradually declined in population.

Disappointed with our view from the watch tower we took a break to decide our plan of action for afternoon birding. I suggested that we go to Alganur Tank, hardly any distance from Rollapadu Sanctuary, since over the last few years we had seen some good migratory birds in the tank, including the Pallas' Gull, Caspian Terns, Black- & Brown-headed Gulls, Flamingos and Bar-headed Goose, to name a few. However, not expecting much (as there was still time for the migrants to arrive) we moved on to Alganur Tank.

On reaching the tank, we were welcomed by the Red Avadavats, Bay-backed & Brown Shrikes. The tank was full of water and we could see good numbers of water birds to our surprise. As we reached closer we saw a Pied Kingfisher feasting on a freshly-caught meal, a huge flock of breeding River Terns, and several juveniles hovering in the sky or calmly settled by the lakeside. There were some Whiskered Terns as well in the flock.

Common Sandpipers & Painted Storks were taking a stroll by the lakeside. Humayun took a good look with his binoculars and pointed at a solitary Greenshank in the middle of the lake.



Pied Kingfisher (Photo: Anita Negi)

Promising to come back at this place again for winter birding, we returned to get ourselves some lunch. On the way back we spotted a Rock Eagle Owl sitting right in front of us on the rocks. We looked at each other at the same time (The Owl & Us). It posed for us for a little while and then flew away into the forest. The excitement was back and all of us were charged again.



Rock Eagle Owl (Photo: Anita Negi)

We halted at the small town of Nandikotkur, around half an hour from Rollapadu, for lunch at around 2:00PM and feasted on some really tasty dishes. Or maybe we were just too hungry! We were also extremely dehydrated by then. Gokul, who hails from Kurnool, made us taste the local drink of Kurnool - *Nannari* - which is supposed to be a body coolant. Having eaten, and hydrated ourselves with the butter milk & the *Nannari*, we decided to go back to the sanctuary, to a small pool of water where the Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and other birds usually come to drink water in the afternoon. As planned we were there by 3:30PM. A solitary Green Sandpiper was feeding itself along with the Little Grebes, while the Sandgrouse and the Eurasian Collared Doves flew down to drink water from the pool.



Eurasian Collared Dove (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Humayun and Lawrence Uncle decided to sit near the pool for some time watching the birds, while the rest of us zealously went around the sanctuary in search of more birds. Since it was too hot, we could only spot Zitting Cisticolas, Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks, House Swifts & the flocks of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse all around. Quite tired, by around 4:30PM we got back to the Florican, which had started its display again. We sat at a little distance, watching it display for an hour. What a sight it was!

The trip to Rollapadu was supposed to be a two-day trip, but Sudhir & I had to return on Saturday evening itself as we had to travel on work the next day. So, after watching the Lesser Florican display, we wished the other birders in the group good luck for the next day and departed.



Indian Courser (Photo: Humayun Taher)



Montagu's Harrier (Photo: Humayun Taher)

* * *

Editors' Note:

Our members made a field trip to Ananthagiri Hills on 15th November 2015. We present below a trip report from two different perspectives.

AN ADVENTURE AMONG NEW FEATHERED FRIENDS

Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills, 15th November 2015

Text and photos: Ritish (Grade-11)



Coppersmith Barbet

It was my first trip to Ananthagiri. I was very much excited when I heard about the field trip. Gokul Bhayya had mentioned that Ananthagiri was a good place to get sunrise and landscape photos, so we decided to reach the destination before the sunrise. We started our journey at 3:30AM from Chikkadpally. We quickly completed our light breakfast at Krupa (Dosa Point) and headed towards Ananthagiri. On our way Sathvik had spotted a Nightjar, so we stopped and tried to find it again, but we couldn't. We eventually reached Ananthagiri around 5:00AM. When I got down from the car it was freezing cold, and I was shivering very badly. The 4 of us picked up our gear and starting walking into the forest. Two of us had headlights. I was scared so I closed my eyes and held Sathvik's hand as I walked. There were spider-webs all around us, and we heard lots of insect sounds.

Since Gokul Bhayya had already visited the place, he said he would lead us. But after following him for an hour, we still could not find the path to the spot we were looking for. Gokul Bhayya could not find the route in the dark, and the lights were of little help. We eventually realized that we were lost, gave up and rested for a short time.

Sunrise had taken place and we were sad that we missed our sunrise shots. As soon as it became light, we saw 2 Nightjars flying over our heads, followed immediately by a Flameback Woodpecker which came and started knocking on a tree bark right in front of us. That moment was a feast to my eyes.

We were happy that it was a good start. We finally found our way to our spot, but since the sun was already up we could not get the photos we were looking for. However, in that landscape we spotted a Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, and started our

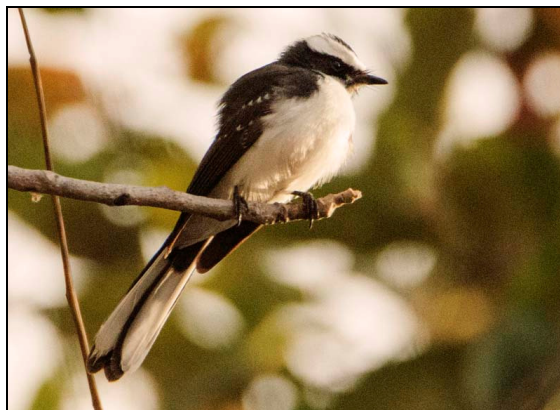
birding from there.

As we proceeded, we spotted Rosy Starlings and White-bellied Drongos; we also saw an Oriental White-eye, which was my first sighting and we all thought we heard a call of Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. We started looking around and it was actually a White-browed Fantail mimicking the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. This was a first sighting too, and I was excited and impressed by its mimicking.

Moving towards the temple, we spotted the Strawberry Finch (Red Avadavat) and some Bee-eaters. We tried to click them but couldn't get any shots. Then we decided to go back to the starting point, as the BSAP members would have already arrived. On our way back we spotted Eurasian Collared Dove, White-naped Woodpecker, Small Minivet and Coppersmith Barbet. At the steps we heard call of a Rufous Treepie and saw it too.

We were sitting down at our car, having some refreshments, when we spotted White-browed Wagtail and Common Myna. After the refreshments we went on to the other side. We stopped at a big tree where we felt that there was lot of action. We saw Thick-billed Flowerpecker, Jerdon's Leafbird, Orange-headed Thrush, Asian Koel and Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker.

We kept on moving and all of a sudden we saw couple of Hornbills and tried to get some clicks, but could not. We had again taken a different route and saw Flameback Woodpeckers flying around us along with Asian Paradise-flycatcher. Later we decided to get back to our car, and met the rest of the members. I had one of my best experiences in my life on this trip. While walking through the forest I felt like I was safe in the hands of Mother Nature.



White-browed Wagtail

WHEN THE SAVANNAHS CALL

Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills, 15th November 2015

Amritha Lawrence

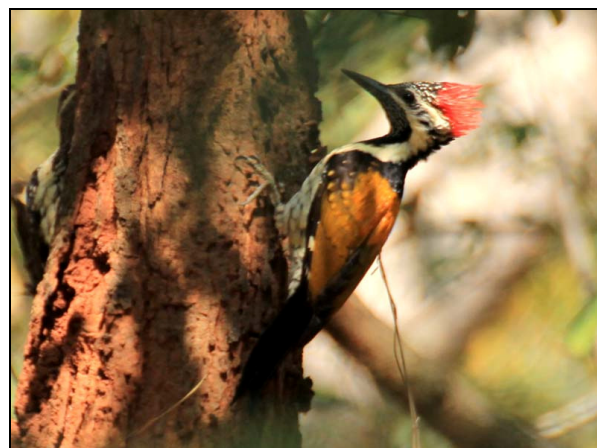


Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

Early mornings on Sundays usually everyone wants to just stay in their beds, nursing their tiresome week and trying to just relax, but for me the joy of a Sunday would be getting lost in a vast stretch of savannahs right across the hills like a free and happy wolf that has nothing to fear. Such is the exhilarating feeling I get when I go to Ananthagiri hills on a misty Sunday morning.

Getting up at the break of dawn and preparing yourself for an amazing day out in the grasslands is refreshing, so like every other birding trip, this one started the same way. We got up at around 4:30AM and got ready to leave to the meeting point, stopping along the way to pick up a few birder friends. After about half an hour we came to the meeting point, where a few enthusiastic birders were already there, and waited for about half an hour more to meet and greet old birders and welcome new juveniles into our flock.

We set out to our destination in a big convoy, stopping at a 'tea point' for some coffee / tea to kick-start our day. After a few impromptu halts en route, we finally reached Ananthagiri Hills around 7:00AM. We split up into smaller groups, so that all the newbies would have some experienced birders to guide them. I, being an explorer, wanted to see a new place so, our group decided to trek up a small hill where we could see a few Rufous Treepies and woodpeckers flying around. That trek did make it clear that ropes and trekking shoes are a must for the next birding trip - you never know when you have to start climbing!



Black-rumped Flameback (Photo: Amritha Lawrence)

We struggled to the top of the hill, taking the help of several tree roots and branches, and felt like we were at the top of the world. Up top, we found a few flycatchers, a thrush, and the treepies and woodpeckers. Realizing that we couldn't go forward, we decided to head back down. But going back down can be quite a challenge, so the solution? - to slide down. That was fun!

Then we got back together with the others to head into the vast grasslands, to try and spot some more birds and, if possible, a few raptors. While crossing the patch of eucalyptus trees, we spotted a handful of Rose-ringed Parakeets and one Nightjar that was snuggled up nicely at a corner of the branch, trying to keep out of the limelight.



Tawny-bellied Babbler (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Moving forward, we spotted the master of disguise - the Indian Chameleon - making its way up a eucalyptus tree.



Indian Chameleon (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Reaching the grasslands, we scattered to see if we could find anything else, but it was already close to afternoon. People were trying to cool themselves under the heat of the winter's sun, so we decided to head back and find a place to relax and have our lunch. In about half an hour, we reached a farm-house belonging to one of our members, and sat around having lunch. A few members of the group were just hanging around the house, looking around, having a go at the boxing bag, relaxing in the hammock or just dipping their feet in the water and cooling off.

Heading back to our cars, we decided to return to the farm-house soon, to resume the birding again. We then bid each other farewell until the next trip, and headed back home, happy at having experienced the winds of the savannah and the freedom

under the blue sky across the hills. Ananthagiri Hills will always make me feel at home within its grasslands.



Orange-headed Thrush (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)



Sahana, one of the young brigade, engrossed in Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds* (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

* * *

Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)



Short-eared Owl (Chennai, 21-03-2015)

Order: Strigiformes
Family: Strigidae
Genus: *Asio*
Species: *A. flammeus*
Size: 37-39 cm

Description & distribution: The Short-eared Owl is a typical member of the genus *Asio*, which are known as the eared owls. The name stems from the tufts of feathers that resemble mammalian ears; these 'ear' tufts may, however, not always be visible. The species name *flammeus* comes from the Latin word meaning "flaming", or "the colour of fire".

The Short-eared Owl has distinctive large, yellow eyes highlighted by encircling black rings and surrounding white facial disks, which give the appearance of a bird wearing a mask. A big head with a short but strong black hooked bill and a short neck gives it a heavy look. The plumage is tawny to brown, mottled, and the wings and tail are barred. The breast is deeply streaked. Females are slightly larger than males. Besides a few other features best seen in flight, the yellow irises serve to distinguish it from the Long-eared Owl, with whom it overlaps

much of its range. Its broad wings and irregular wingbeats give it a floppy flight that resembles that of a bat or moth.

The Short-eared Owl has one of the widest distributions among all birds, being found on all continents except Australia and Antarctica. Ten sub-species are recognised, with *A. f. flammeus*, the nominate, being found in North America, Europe, and the northern parts of Africa and Asia. It is a local migrant, wintering in the southern parts of its range.

Habitat & behaviour: The Short-eared Owl is usually seen in small groups, numbering 3-4 or less. Though it huts mainly at night, it is also known to be diurnal and crepuscular. Hunting is said to coincide more with the high-activity period of its main prey, voles and rodents. It flies low over the ground, until it swoops feet-first on its prey. Besides rodents, it may pick up other small mammals like mice, shrews, squirrels, moles and bats. Near coasts and adjacent wetlands, they are known to prey on smaller birds like terns and smaller gulls, whereas inland, they may pick up larks, pipits, starlings or flycatchers; they may also add insects like beetles, grasshoppers, caterpillars etc. In North America, it has shown a frequent tendency to compete aggressively with the Northern Harrier, with whom it shares

habitat and prey, and these species are known to harry each other.

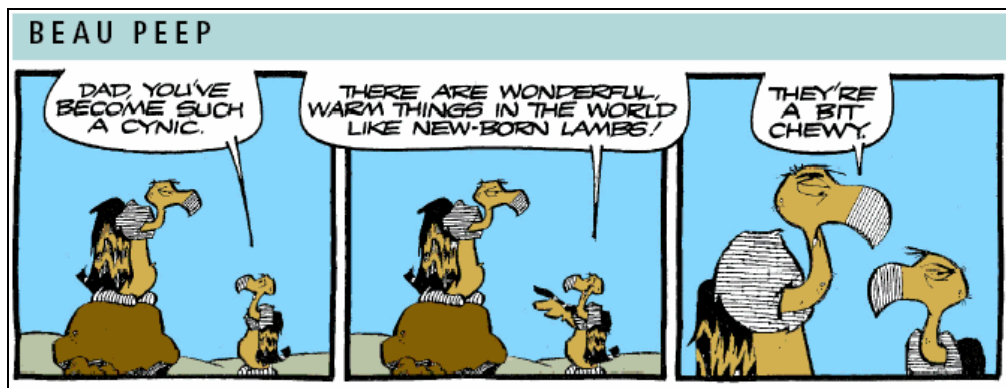
Its call is scratchy and bark-like; the usual sounds are a grating *waowk*, *waowk* or a *toot*, *toot*, *toot*. While breeding, it may also emit a loud *eee-yerp*. It is usually silent on the wintering grounds.

Nesting: The Short-eared Owl breeds from March to June; otherwise seen in ones and twos, during breeding season they may gather in flocks. The males put on a spectacular courtship display, swooping over the nest while flapping its wings. It nests

on the ground in prairie, tundra, savanna or meadow grasslands. The nest is usually a depression on the ground, lined with weeds, grass or feathers, and concealed by bushes or other low vegetation. The usual clutch consists of 4-7 white eggs, though this may go up to 12 at times when food is abundant. There is only one brood per year. Incubation is usually done by the females. The Short-eared Owl is known to use a broken-wing display to lure predators away from its nest.

Local name: The Short-eared Owl is known as '*pucha munga*' in Malayalam, '*ravayido dhuvad*' in Gujarati and '*pecha*' in Oriya.

Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 02-10-2012)

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)